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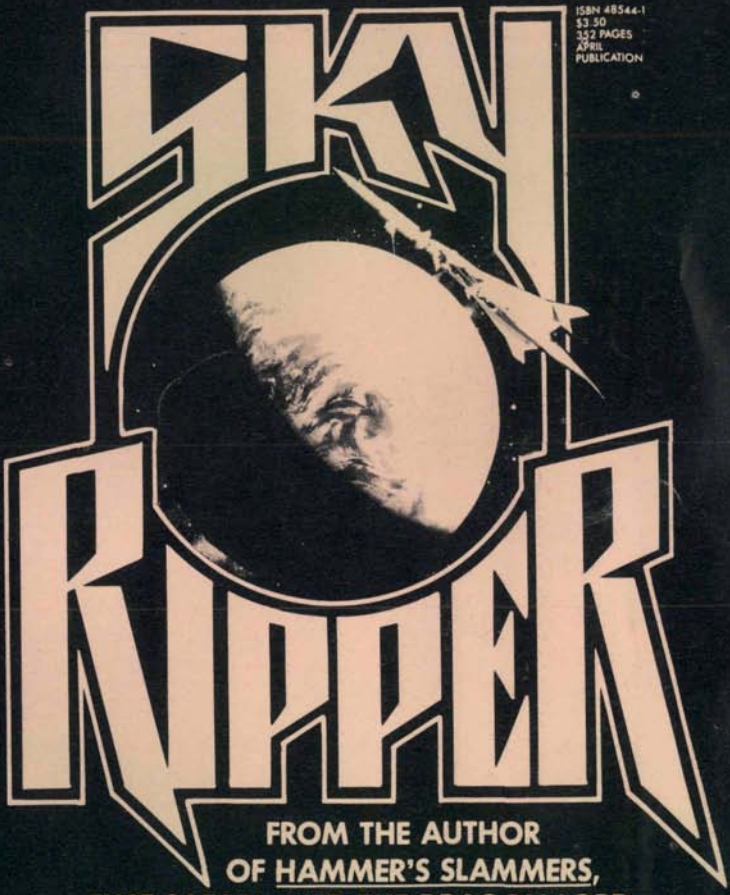


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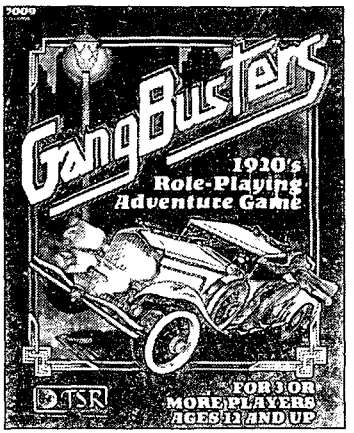
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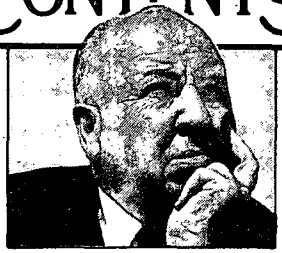
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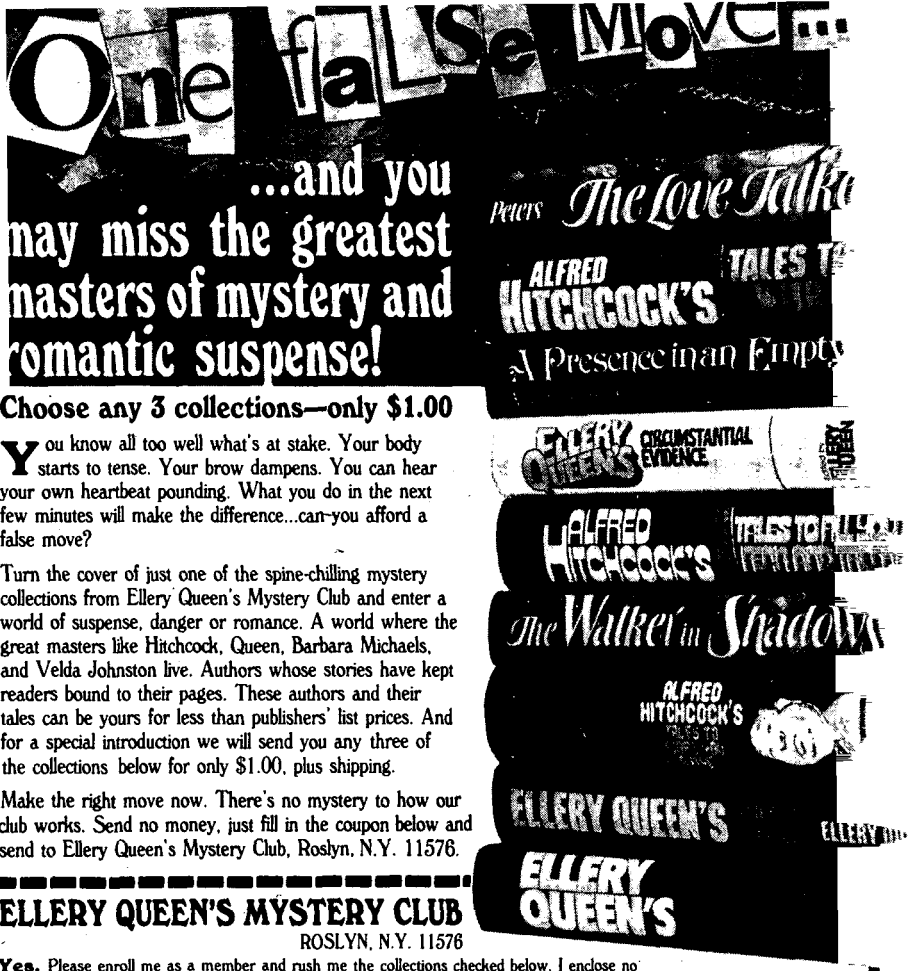
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Stephen Wasylyk, author of "The Spring That Ellie Died," this issue's cover story, has been writing for AHMM for fifteen years this month. That first story, published in April of 1968, was called "The Loose End," and it was not only his first fiction sale, it was the first mystery he'd ever tried writing. "Ellie" is his seventy-ninth story for us; he has also published nine stories in EQMM.

Before he got into the story-writing business (which he does in the evenings after work), Mr. Wasylyk had had a varied career. He has been a commercial pilot—after having been a fighter pilot in World War II—a photographer, a salesman, an advertising copywriter, and an art director.

He is presently the creative director for a printing and sales promotion business in Philadelphia.

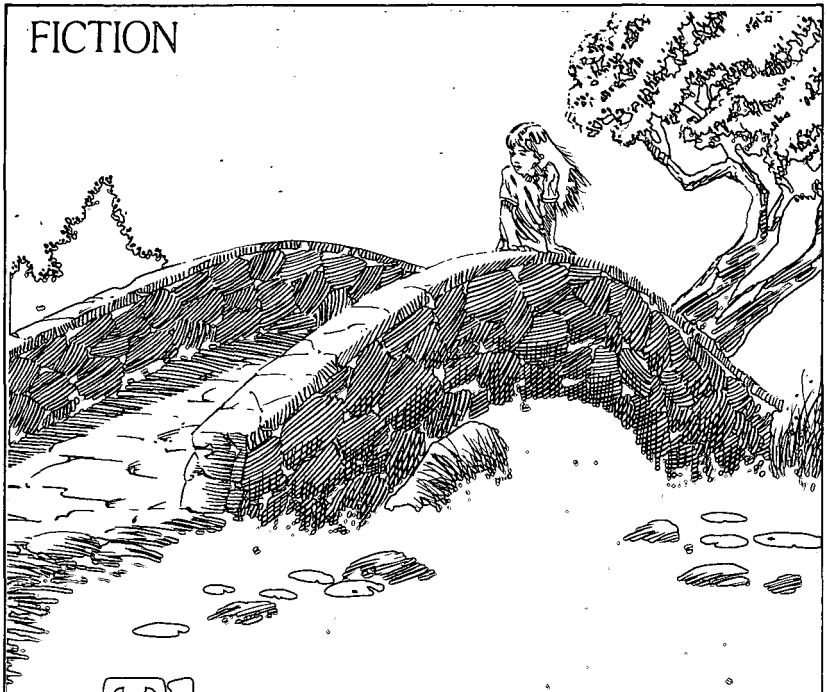
Over these past fifteen years, Mr. Wasylyk has brought us some memorable series characters. Our readers doubtless remember that delightful pair of crime-solving senior citizens, Morley and Bakov, denizens of the Golden Age Retirement Center; Police Lieutenant Hoke Bennett; and Fox River's Sheriff Gates and his deputy Julio (see "The Vandal" in the July, 1982, issue for their most recent adventure). There have been many other non-series stories as well, of which "Ellie" is one; like the Fox River stories, it centers around small town life, and introduces us to Sheriff Beeslip, a science-minded youngster named Kevin, and most of all to Ellie herself. It is, we think, a particularly touching tale.

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FICTION



The Spring That Ellie Died

by Stephen Wasylyk

Illustration by Ray Lago

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The spring that Ellie died, the crocuses were up early and brighter than ever and the dogwood flowered with an exuberant abundance and Ellie loved it because, as her father said, she was an elf, a wood-sprite, a child of nature. But two days had passed and we still had no firm idea of why Ellie had been found dead under the small stone bridge over the rocky creek.

It wasn't much of a bridge. Eight feet high at most, an archway of carefully fitted stones, with a waist-high abutment on either side of the road that curved in the shape of a funnel to direct traffic onto the overpass.

It wasn't much of a creek, either. Shallow enough to be waded easily, yet deep enough for trout to grow to a fair size. Studded with rocks below the bridge, it splashed and murmured and gurgled happily like creeks everywhere.

Ellie's battered bicycle was alongside the parapet, her body below the arch, her head resting on the large rock that had killed her, the water soaking the tattered jeans and the pullover shirt and swirling the long, dark hair and washing away the seeping blood and, seeing that slight body in the glare of my flashlight, I had almost cried, which wasn't what a hardened sheriff's deputy was supposed to do.

But my tears would have been only a prelude to those of the town because almost everyone knew and loved Ellie, and those tears in turn were only a prelude to the anger that the town directed at Sheriff Beeslip and me when we didn't come up with an immediate arrest.

I suppose that Beeslip and I went over it a hundred times.

Ellie had left the small shopping center at the edge of town at just about eight forty-five, pedalling her bicycle into the darkness toward her home a mile away.

Only a mile.

Even pedalling slowly, she would have been home in ten minutes, if Ellie ever pedalled slowly, which she didn't. So she must have reached the bridge in less than five.

Beeslip's theory was that a motorist had hit her as she passed over the bridge or had forced her into the abutment, smashing into the bicycle and catapulting Ellie to the creek bed.

It could have been. She had a large bruise on her forehead and several others on her body where she had landed on the rocks, but the doctor said the cause of death was a skull fracture from the large rock her head had struck. The bicycle

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was scratched, mortar from the bridge embedded in the tire, the light broken, and the abutment showed scratches and traces of red paint from the bike, but I couldn't understand why a car couldn't have passed with plenty of room, why the flashlight Ellie carried in a clip on the bike was next to the body, or how a thirteen year-old who had practically lived on a bike since she was seven had been trapped against the abutment. She probably wouldn't have even started across the bridge if she'd seen a car coming.

"What's bothering you, Harvey?" My wife's hand reached across the space between the chairs on our small patio and squeezed mine. "It looks like nothing more than an accident. She could have been pitched over the abutment when a car squeezed her against the side of the bridge."

"Why didn't the person stop? Why wasn't it reported?"

"Panic. They'll come forward after they have a chance to think or realize you're sure to find out who they are. After all, it isn't as though someone would want to hurt Ellie."

I sat and meditated and let the warm spring night speak for me until I could get my thoughts together.

"I suppose what bothers me is that Beeslip and I haven't come up with anything, but I swear I don't know what more we could have done. We've talked to the people who live along that road a half dozen times. None of them saw or heard a thing, and all of them say they were not on the road at any time. We've alerted every auto body shop in a fifty mile radius to report anyone wanting small scratches or dents repaired. We've examined every car in the parking lots and on the road that caught our eye. Nothing. It's as if she pedalled into a vacuum and turned up dead."

"It could have been a complete stranger, just passing through."

"Not on that road. It goes nowhere and leads to nothing. Only the local people use it. Now, today, Beeslip told me some people driving over that bridge have seen something. What, they don't know. A light, a shape that appears for an instant and is gone. They're beginning to say that it's Ellie's ghost."

"People and their imaginations," she said. "I never heard anything more ridiculous in my life."

"Still, Beeslip wants me to go out there and take a look tonight. It's about time for me to leave."

"I'll come along."

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"I don't know if Beeslip would approve."

"Never mind Beeslip. After all, I liked Ellie, too."

Fifteen minutes later I pulled off the road and turned off the lights. The only sounds were the subdued watery murmur of the creek swirling around the rocks, the cacophony of insects rushing the season, and the dull croaking of a frog somewhere upstream.

"Let's walk," she said.

I pulled the powerful flashlight from its clamp beneath the dash and we left the car. There was no moon, but the air was clear and the starlight bright so there was enough light to keep us on the road. We crossed the bridge and stood for a few moments on the other side.

"I don't see a thing," she said. "Where's your ghost?"

"I didn't say there was one. It's just that some people reported seeing something. Exactly what it was, if it was anything at all, remains to be seen."

Her hand suddenly tightened on my arm. "Shhh."

We stood motionless.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"I thought I saw something."

"In the dark? I didn't know you had the eyes of a cat."

"A darker shadow that seemed to move."

I pressed the flashlight into her hand. "Use this."

She held it out before her with both hands. The bright light suddenly stabbed through the darkness and focused on the far side of the creek.

A small shape darted beneath the bridge.

I grabbed the light, crossed the road and waited until I heard the faint splashing. I flicked on the light.

A young boy scrambled up the bank.

I sprinted across the bridge and cut him off.

He looked up into the light, his face white, eyes frightened behind the glasses.

"It's Deputy Caswell, Kevin," I said. "Come on up."

He scrambled the rest of the way, a small boy about twelve, with a thin face and slightly protuberant teeth, his shirt hanging loosely, his sneakers and jeans soaked. He was carrying a small battery lantern and I had a hunch I had discovered what the passing people had seen.

My wife came up. "Kevin MacDonald," she said, using the tone women always reserve for young boys caught doing something they shouldn't, "just what on earth are you doing here?"

"Investigating," he said.

"Investigating what?" I asked.

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"Maybe Ellie's murder." His voice was angry and tearful.

"No one has really called it that," I said.

"I have. I know."

"You know what?"

"Who killed her." His voice was angrier now.

I took his shoulder. "You'd better come with me."

I put him in the back seat.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To my home," I said.

"Are you going to question me?"

"I certainly am."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay," I said, as I spun the wheel. "Then I'm taking you to your parents."

"I'd rather you didn't. I told my mother I was going to the movies."

"With that lantern?"

"She doesn't know about that."

"I suppose there are other things she doesn't know about. Want to make a deal?"

"What kind of deal?"

"We go to my house for some ice cream, you tell me what you're up to, and I let you off on your corner."

"It's a deal," he said.

The general consensus was that Kevin MacDonald would grow up to teach one of the sciences at a university somewhere. Certainly, he was interested in nothing else. At the age of ten, he had backed one of the family cars out of the garage into a bed of petunias, lowered the garage door, and announced that henceforth the garage was his laboratory. Not quite the completely tolerant parent, his father had warmed his bottom for him for attempting to drive the car but had also compromised to the extent that half of the two-car garage was now indeed Kevin's laboratory, a decision his father had come to regret because one of Kevin's latest projects had been the concoction of a foul smelling mixture that allowed no one to enter the garage for a week and still permeated the entire neighborhood on a windy day.

At any rate, the kid was bright beyond his years, and if he had something to say, I was more than willing to listen.

I sat him at the kitchen table and watched him fiddle with the ice cream.

"All right," I said. "What were you doing out at the bridge?"

"Investigating."

"If you have some information, why didn't you bring it to the sheriff? You know we've been working on Ellie's death for two days."

"Well—" He dug at the ice cream as though he really wasn't interested. "I don't know anything definite."

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"Definite or not, you should have told us what you had on your mind. After all, if there is any investigating to be done, we're in a much better position to do it than you are."

"I wanted to go to the sheriff with something he could work on. Who listens to a kid?"

"I do. Let's start at the beginning. You said Ellie was murdered."

"She might have been."

"And you say you know who."

He pushed the ice cream from him slowly. "There was a man who used to hang around the bridge, waiting for the girl."

"What girl?"

"The one he used to meet."

"All right, a man used to meet a girl out at the bridge. How did you know?"

"I like to go down to the creek at night and the bridge is one of my favorite places. It's interesting during the day, but you can see a lot of things at night, too. I sit quietly and wait. Then when I hear something, I turn on my light. There are some 'possums that live near the bridge. I've seen them more than once."

"What about the man?"

"When I turned on my light one night, I guess it was the first he knew someone else was there so he yelled at me to get out. I ran. Once he even threw stones at me. When you shone that light at me tonight, I thought you were him."

"Do you know who he was?"

"No. He would just yell, 'Hey kid, get out of there or I'll beat your head in,' or something like that and I'd run. He sounded as though he meant it."

"Suppose he was there tonight instead of me," I said. "What did you intend to do?"

"Get a look at him so I could tell the sheriff."

My wife rolled her eyes.

"You said he was waiting for a girl. How did you know?"

"Once you go over the bridge, there's a little road there that the fishermen sometimes use. The second time, I saw her go by and turn in there right after he chased me. I guessed he was waiting for her."

"How could you see her in the dark?"

"It's never really *that* dark, once your eyes get used to it, but the car had no top and when she passed, I could see her long hair against the glare from the headlights."

"Did you recognize her?"

"All I know is that it was a girl driving a car."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know. I'm not interested in cars."

"How many times did you see the man?"

"Three or four."

"Two nights in a row, a week

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apart, exactly when?"

"Every time on a Monday."

I glanced at my wife. Ellie had been killed Monday night.

"Were you out there the night Ellie was killed?"

He had been answering quickly, without hesitation. This time he waited for a few long seconds and when he spoke, his voice was low.

"No, but I had told her about the 'possums. She said the next time she went by there at night she'd stop and look for them. I guess she forgot."

"Forgot what?"

"What I said. I told her about the man and not to go on Monday. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything about the 'possums at all. If I hadn't, she wouldn't have stopped and he wouldn't have—"

I broke through the pain and the tears in his voice harshly. "Hold it! You don't know that anything like that happened."

"You listen to me, Kevin," said my wife gently. "You had nothing to do with what happened there and I don't want you thinking that way. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said unconvincingly.

Oh hell, I thought. The kid didn't deserve this. He'd told Ellie about the 'possums and maybe she'd stopped to look for them and now she was dead and he was blaming himself. We could say what we wanted to, but he'd think his own thoughts and carry his own burdens, as unfair as they might be, and all we could do was hope we were smart enough to talk him out of it.

"I wish you'd come to us immediately," I said.

"I told you. I didn't think anybody would listen to a kid."

"There is one thing you must promise. Keep away from that bridge until I tell you it is all right to go back, 'possums or no 'possums. Any investigating of this unknown man waiting for the unknown girl will be handled by me and me alone. Is that clear?"

He glanced at me nervously. "Do you think that maybe Ellie didn't stop to look for the 'possums?"

"She probably forgot all about them right after you told her," I reassured him.

I was lying and he probably knew it. Looking for those 'possums was exactly the kind of thing Ellie would do.

My wife put her arm around him. "Always remember, Kevin, that you can't hold yourself responsible for what other people do or don't do."

He smiled suddenly. "Hey, you know what? I'm glad I told you. Are you really going to try to find out who the man is?"

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"I really am. If he was there, he might be able to tell us what happened."

"Then why didn't he come and tell you himself?"

I shrugged. "You never know about these things, Kevin. He might think he has a good reason."

I had a pretty good idea of why the man hadn't come forward. The girl. It sounded like a lovers' meeting to me—one that had to be kept secret, which was why he'd chased Kevin in the first place.

But now Kevin was the only one who knew, the only one who could put the man at the bridge on Monday nights.

"Do you think the man would recognize you if he saw you during daylight?" I asked casually.

The thin shoulders almost touched his ears. "He had a flashlight but a kid is a kid to grownups."

He was probably right, but I couldn't gamble.

"Come on," I said. "I'm taking you home."

"A block from home," he said.

"Right to the door. Call it a bonus for your cooperation."

I explained things to his parents and asked them to keep him close to the house for a few days.

"One thing more," I told his father. "He has an idea that if he hadn't told Ellie about the 'possums, she wouldn't have died. He's blaming himself. You'll have to handle him very carefully."

He passed a hand over his face. "The poor kid. I appreciate your telling me and you can bet I'll be doing a lot of talking. Let's hope I'm as good a salesman as I think I am."

"Look at it this way," I said. "It's one sale you have to make."

The next morning Beeslip and I went out to the bridge. The lane Kevin had seen the girl turn into was about twenty or thirty feet beyond the creek and was used by fishermen who drove in to get off the road. It wasn't noted as a lovers' lane. Those were scattered elsewhere.

While Beeslip and I had checked it out when we first investigated, it didn't seem to have any bearing on the problem in front of us because we had construed the accident as having occurred on the bridge itself.

Now we went over it again.

Beeslip was a small, thin man in his late fifties who had trouble finding shirts that fitted properly, so he always looked as if he was wearing someone's hand-me-downs.

We walked down the little lane, which was only about three car lengths long before it ran into a big oak.

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"You can see why they picked this as a meeting place," said Beeslip. "Once in here, no one can see you."

"Except a kid down at the creek studying 'possums."

"If the man had just kept quiet, even Kevin wouldn't have noticed."

"I don't think that concerned him. He didn't want Kevin to see the car turn in, which Kevin did."

"Kevin saw one car. How did the man get here?"

"Probably drove, too. There's enough room for two to park."

Beeslip tugged his too-long sleeves above his wrists in an automatic gesture. "You think they were here the night the girl died?"

"The odds say they were."

"I guess you'll want to stake out the place next Monday."

"If nothing turns up before then. They might think it's safe and that we're all through here."

We were walking back to the road when I stopped and squatted beside a bare patch of soft ground that showed the imprint of a tire.

"Forget it," said Beeslip. "If we had found that the morning after, I might think we had something. Two days later, it doesn't mean much."

"Only one way to be sure."

"Has to belong to a fisherman. We couldn't be that lucky."

I shrugged. "No harm in trying, is there? I'll make a cast and run it down to the state police lab. They can give us the make of the tire from the tread design."

"Go ahead. Dumber cops than us have lucked out."

I was back that afternoon. The lab said the tread design was that of a foreign made radial, which to me spelled import because while there might be one or two domestic ragtops around, most of them would be those little sports cars.

The lab man could tell me the kind of tire, but as he explained, there was no distinguishing mark like a cut or a nick, so there was no way to tie the cast into a specific tire on a specific car, which was all right with me for the moment. At least I had something to work on.

Beeslip listened, then called the Motor Vehicle Bureau in the state capital for the registrations of imported convertibles in the county. Their computer spit it out so fast, we had a list in the morning mail.

We went over it name by name, striking out those we considered too far away, since we felt the couple had to live in the immediate vicinity or they wouldn't be so secretive. We narrowed it down to an even

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dozen and I hit the road.

The first four were owned by young men, and the tire treads differed greatly from the one in the photo the state police lab had made for me.

The fifth was registered to a Debra Vanamen, the address a house just a little outside of town in a new development. I found the street, pulled up behind a green Mercedes and walked around it. There were no scratches or dents, the surface was mirror-like, but I had the feeling even before I looked that the tires would match. There was a trace of mud on the right rear wheel that looked a great deal like the loam alongside the creek, and I scraped a portion into a utility bill envelope I had in my pocket, folded it, and put it away carefully.

The woman who answered the door was an attractive, fortyish type with long, wavy brown hair with beauty parlor frosting.

"I'm looking for Debra Vanamen," I said.

"You've found her. Why are you looking?"

"Is that your car at the curb?"

She frowned. "Have I done something wrong? I don't remember breaking any traffic laws."

"Does anyone other than you ever drive it?"

"My daughter. And my husband on occasion."

"If your daughter is at home, I'd like to see her."

Her eyes were puzzled. "Come in."

I waited in the hallway while she went upstairs. I heard the murmur of voices and then she came down, followed by a girl who couldn't have been more than seventeen. The girl wore a white tennis outfit; her sun-yellow hair was parted in the center, falling to her shoulders, her face round and with a doll-like prettiness.

"This is my daughter, Leslie. Now what is this all about?"

"Last Monday night, a young girl was found dead at the bridge on the other side of town," I said. "You may remember reading about it."

She nodded. "Tragic. Hit and run, I believe."

"Possibly. A car like yours driven by a long-haired girl was seen in the vicinity."

"Good Lord," said the mother.

"I wasn't there," said Leslie quickly.

"You drove the car last Monday?"

She hesitated before nodding. "I still wasn't there."

"Perhaps you weren't," I said. "But the car was."

"You can't prove that."

"I think I can. The car was parked in the lane along the creek at the far side of the

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bridge. Now, if you weren't driving it, who was?"

"Why on earth should I go there?"

"To meet a man."

"Oh, God," said the mother.

"I met no one," said Leslie. "You can't prove that I did."

"You met the man several times. On Monday nights at about nine. We have a witness."

The mother made a sound deep in her throat and covered her mouth with one hand.

"Forget it," said the girl. "I wasn't there."

"I'd like to remind you," I said slowly, "that a young girl died. If you were not involved, you have an obligation to help us determine who was."

"I'm not saying anything."

"Leslie," said her mother. "There is no reason why—"

"Oh, Mother," said the girl wearily. "Please shut up."

I took them both to the sheriff's office. Beeslip could get no more from her than I did, and when her father and his attorney showed up, we had no choice but to let her go.

Beeslip and I drove to my house for lunch.

Halfway through his sandwich, Beeslip said, "I don't think there is any question the couple was involved somehow. If they merely witnessed what happened, she could have found something to say without giving the man's name. What I'd like to do is find the man."

My wife filled the coffee cups and replaced the percolator firmly. "You two are not too bright," she said.

"I don't deny that," I said, "but we're smart enough to always welcome assistance."

"If you'll think back a few years to when we were young, we did our share of parking in secluded spots but we never *met* there. The only reason a couple would have for meeting like that would be because they couldn't afford to be seen together. Now what is the obvious, overriding reason for that?"

Beeslip popped the last of his sandwich into his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. "The man is married."

"Exactly," said my wife.

"Hold it," I said. "If it was one of those things, she had a car and there are plenty of motels within easy driving distance."

"I thought we agreed they couldn't afford to be seen together."

"He could have met her there."

"You're assuming he also had a car," she said.

"What man doesn't?"

"Try a young married one, who can't afford two cars yet, or even the price of a motel room for his rendezvous, and

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whose wife uses the car on Monday evening, which leaves him free to meet the girl but he has to walk there. Now who, along that road, would fit that description?"

Beeslip and I were both halfway out the door before she finished talking.

His name was Ebert and he lived in the third house from the bridge. Ellie had lived several houses farther down the road.

He was tall, with loose black hair, a bony face, and a smoldering resentment against the world that showed in the dark eyes. We had no record on him, but we did find out he'd managed to get himself fired from every job he'd ever had because he had a hard, quick temper. At present, he was pumping gas in the service station on the main highway and his wife worked evenings in one of the stores in the small shopping center.

We brought him in and questioned him. He didn't even blink when I mentioned the name Vanamen, but I was sure he was the right man. The trouble was, he was no more inclined to answer than the girl, and we still didn't know how the two of them fitted into Ellie's death.

We were in Beeslip's office, Beeslip behind his desk and Ebert in a chair alongside, while I leaned on a filing cabinet and felt a flickering anger at the unconcerned expression on Ebert's face.

"I think I'll run a check on the Vanamen car," I said. "You probably left prints in it."

That jolted the unconcern from his face.

"The mud on the tire proves the car was there and your prints prove you were in the car. Even a good lawyer won't be able to explain that away. We already know you like to throw stones. Who's to say you didn't go a step further this time?"

He jerked his head around, his eyes angry. "You guys will railroad anybody, won't you? Well, I had nothing to do with it. I admit I used to meet that Vanamen broad there. But not last Monday. I told her I was no longer interested, that it was all over. I didn't need that kid sneaking around. The next thing would be for the story to get out and my wife to know. I love my wife. Vanamen was just a little fling but she was getting possessive. So I called it off. She was there Monday night, all right, but she was there alone. She called me the next day and gave me hell for not meeting her."

I stared at him. "She told you she was there?" I took a step, my expression causing Beeslip

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to come to his feet nervously. *"Didn't it occur to you she might know what happened to Ellie?"*

His eyes dropped. "Sure. Sure it did. But how could I tell anyone without saying what had been going on?"

"So you decided to protect your own hide. The kid was dead, but all you thought of was yourself."

"My wife," he said. "I told you—"

"What's she going to think of you now?"

He stared at the floor.

"If it's any consolation, her opinion of you can't possibly be any lower than mine."

We put him in a cell until we decided what to do with him, which was probably nothing.

So the girl had been there. I sat and thought about that beat-up bike and that nice, shiny Mercedes without a scratch on it. An idea came so I brought Ellie's bike in and dusted it for fingerprints.

I found two different sets, both feminine.

I showed them to Beeslip and he looked up, his eyes cold, and said, "Go get her."

When they were all there—the Vanamen girl, the parents, and the attorney—I took Ellie's bike and slammed it down before her and waited, but her eyes were fixed on nothing in particular.

"Would you like to tell us how your prints managed to get on this bike?"

She didn't say a word.

Beeslip sighed. "I suppose we might as well get the county attorney over here and have her charged."

The mother rose to her feet slowly as though she was bearing a great weight on her shoulders, a weight that diminished her and made her seem smaller.

"It wasn't her," she whispered. "It was me."

"You can't protect her," I said. "The fingerprints will say she was there."

She held out her hands. "See for yourself."

The muscles in Vanamen's face seemed to have lost all life. The flesh sagged, his mouth hung open, and his color had disappeared.

"Leslie was protecting me," she whispered. "She didn't want her father to know."

I looked at Beeslip. We'd assumed all along it had been the girl, because that's what Kevin had said—a girl with long hair—but now I remembered that Ebert had called her the Vanamen broad and hadn't given her a name.

"Don't say anything more," snapped the attorney.

He might as well have saved his breath because she'd been walking around with it for four

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days and there was no stopping the torrent of words now.

She'd gone there to meet Ebert and had become angrier and more frustrated as the minutes passed. Ellie had stopped to look for the 'possums and Mrs. Vanamen had seen the light on the bridge. She assumed it was Kevin, the reason Ebert had given her for breaking off the affair, and a burning resentment had made her pick up a stone and throw it as hard as she could.

In the dark, without a clear target, that stone should have missed Ellie by a mile. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand it would have.

This was the exception.

The stone hit Ellie and knocked her over the parapet. Mrs. Vanamen had seen the dark shape plunge and the flashlight fall and realized what she had done. She ran to the spot but could see nothing, so she went down and found Ellie dead. The anger and frustration were now fear and panic. All she knew was that she had killed someone with no way to explain how or why or what she was doing there, so she'd taken Ellie's bike and smashed it against the abutment several times to make it look like a hit and run, and had taken off.

"I didn't mean to do it," she said dully.

I suppose she meant that, but you don't hurl a stone at someone without malice in your heart, and trying to cover up the results will win you no points in any hall of justice.

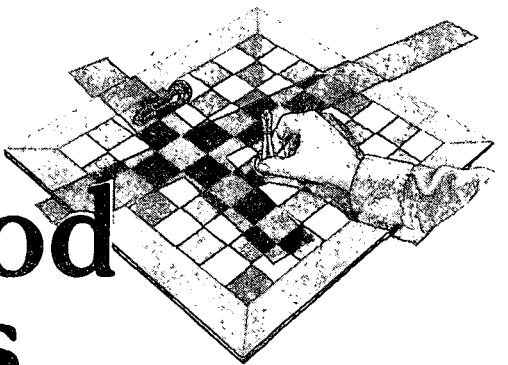
Late that night I went outside for a breath of air before I turned in. I looked at the starlit sky and savored the balmy air that would soon turn hot and still. More flowers would bloom and the countryside would become lush and green as it had for countless years and would for countless more.

Even new generations of 'possums would find their way to the water beneath the bridge, perhaps watched by twelve-year-old boys armed with flashlights and curiosity, and there would be nothing to distinguish this spring from all the others that were inexorably the same.

Except the tragic, unnecessary death of an elfin woodsprite with an insatiable thirst for nature, and a dark cloud in the happy memories of a small boy, who wanted only to share the thrill of discovery with a friend.

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FICTION



The Plywood Cross

by Brent Haywood

It had been a quiet night. I had keyed all my stations once an hour and spent the rest of the time at my basement desk, making butts out of Chesterfields. It's not much of a job for a private investigator — hauling a clock from key to key through an empty office building all night, but then I'm not much of a private investigator. Nobody is, these days; too many sickos, too much bland compromise, and too many still-living souls sleeping the big sleep. Philip Marlowe would have had a tough time with the eighties.

And so do I, but that's another story. It was getting near quitting time and I was finishing up with the morning paper when Timmy came in. Timmy's the guy who watches the air conditioning in the daytime. He's forty, with thick dark hair and perfect false teeth. Also, he's a nice guy, not too bright, and this morning, along with his usual tool box, he carried a plywood cross about three feet high. A little above center, where the crosspieces met, the plywood flared out to form a heart. There was some writing on the heart-shaped part. Timmy was charged up, al-

Illustration by Ron Chironna

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ready chattering in that Ninth Ward New Orleans accent that sounds as if it was transplanted from the South Bronx.

"Mike! Hey, Mike! Take a looka dis! I'ma ax ya watcha think and ya gotta tell me, fa true!"

"I think it's a plywood cross with a heart in the middle." I'm witty as hell at eight in the morning. That didn't stop Timmy.

"Yeah, yeah! I'm makin' it fa ma aunt. And looka hea." He propped the cross on the desk so I could see the writing. It was a flowing cursive, etched into the wood with a moto-tool. It said "Love Is the Way."

"It's nice, Timmy," I said, and I meant it. I'm a hard guy, but stuff like that gets to me.

"Ya think?" he said. "I got da idea outa a magazine, but I ain't gonna tell *her* dat. I axed her what she wanted an' she tol' me one a dem toaster-ovens what sits ona counta so she won't hafta bend down to get to da regula' oven. I'll get her one a dem when I get some cash togetha. Hey, awnest, ya think it looks good? I still got some work to do on it . . .

"Ya know, I was thinkin' I might make a few up an try an sell 'em, dat is if . . . "

"Oh, damn!" I looked meaningfully at my Timex and said it again: "Oh, damn! I'm late. You have a good day, Timmy." He was still chattering as I started up the stairs. I like Timmy. I like the way he takes care of his old aunt and makes crosses for her out of plywood with his own hands. I like him about as much as I like anything at eight in the morning after a night of playing security guard. I would have hung around, but his plywood cross was making me want a drink and I hate to drink in the morning.

I walked out through the lobby. Max was already at his station by the door. Max wears a uniform just like mine except he keeps his clean and pressed. He must be about sixty, but there's not a wrinkle in his ageless black face, except for around the spot in his mouth where he fits something ugly that I'm sure he calls a cigar.

"Morning, Max," I said.

"Morning, Mike," he said. Max doesn't much like me, or maybe he doesn't like eight in the morning any more than I do. Either way, he never looks up from his paper on my account.

Outside, it was another muggy day on Poydras Street. I worked up a good sweat just taking off my jacket, and I was dripping by the time I made the streetcar stop on Saint Charles. I got out my newspaper, put a cigarette between my lips, and stood real still, letting the heat

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do what it would. I was halfway through a story about a killing in Chalmette when a voice made me look up.

"Hello, Mike! How are you this morning?" The voice belonged to Lou Cunningham, a big-time oil lease broker with offices in my building. With him was a guy I didn't know, a young guy who might have been the world's handsomest man. Cunningham looked a little warm, and just turning my head had started me sweating heavily, but this young guy was as cool and fresh as a new martini. Cunningham didn't bother to introduce us but got right to the point. "Timmy come in yet?" I told him he had, and they went on by. If I had thought about it at the time, it would have struck me as odd: it was early for Cunningham to be coming to work, and there wasn't much reason for him to be looking for Timmy. I didn't think about it, though. Thinking when it's hot out makes me want a drink, and like I said, I hate to drink in the morning.

The streetcar came and I caught a ride uptown. I followed words across my paper and the streetcar followed tracks through the business district, past Lee Circle with the general turning his back to the North, through the warm sweet olive smell of the Garden District, past the colleges and Audubon Park, all the way to the end of Saint Charles. The right turn onto Carrolton made me fold my paper, and I got off three stops later and walked toward the river on Oak. The Maple Leaf bar was just opening up, but I didn't go in. Three blocks later I was home: two rooms in the hump of a camelback shotgun that are no hotter than anywhere else in New Orleans this time of year.

In the first room I stopped to look at a problem on my chessboard. Philip Marlowe used to keep problems set up on his chessboard, too, and he wasn't any better than I am at solving them. After a minute the chessmen looked as if they were starting to sweat, and it wasn't because of any way I was going to move them. I went into the next room, turned on the window fan, tossed my uniform and my gun over a chair, and got into bed.

When I woke up, it was around two, and it hadn't cooled off any. I found a beer in the refrigerator and took it with me into the shower. When I turned off the water, the beer was gone, and I was clean and cool. I lit a cigarette and almost managed to get dry before I started sweating again. I found a clean pair of jeans and a T-shirt in my bedroom, along with my Converse All-Stars. I wadded up my uniform and started

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out. The chess problem in the front room wasn't closer to being solved, but I didn't linger over it. It wasn't morning any more, and I don't mind drinking in the afternoons.

The Maple Leaf has a laundromat in the back, and I loaded up my uniform and started it spinning. At the bar I ordered a beer, found a stool under a ceiling fan, and waited for Murphy.

I was on my second beer and my clothes were on their second rinse when he came in. Everyone in the place knows Murphy. He's an older guy, kind of Irish-looking, who was a cop in Boston about a thousand years ago. I tried to get him to talk about it once, but his pug face just tightened up and he said, "Move the pieces." We were playing chess at the time. Anyway, he came in and sat on the stool next to me, and the bartender brought him a beer.

"Give me a game today, Murphy?" I said.

"Sure, kid," he said. The bartender gave me a box of pieces, and we went to the chess table by the window. Murphy plays a pretty unimaginative game, always using the Ruy Lopez opening and always making the classic error of pinning my knight on the fourth move. Also, he always wins.

After the first game, I put my uniform in a dryer. By the time it was dry, he had won another. Two guys from a local weekly came in and started a game on the next board, and Murphy went over to the bar. I knew one of them pretty well, a young guy named Jack Lucas. I watched the reporters for a couple minutes, then joined Murphy. The bartender brought our beer and took the box of pieces.

"Who won this time?" he asked. It was a rhetorical question, but I nodded toward Murphy anyway. The bartender shook his head and took my money.

"Thanks, kid," Murphy said, sipping his beer.

"Any time," I said. "Every time, in fact. Mind telling me why?"

"I dunno, kid. Maybe you read too many chess books." That was a pretty long sentence for Murphy. I sat quiet, hoping he'd go on. He did. "Look. It ain't the books, kid. The way I see it, you're always trying to play with pieces that ain't there. You gotta learn to play with what's on the board in front of you." I drank my beer and thought about that, and Murphy drank his beer and thought about whatever it is he thinks about. I imagined him thinking up new and ever more cryptic pieces of advice, but I really couldn't complain. I'd asked for it.

After a while the two news-

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paper guys came over and got their beer. Lucas wanted a game with me so I went back over to the boards. We played two games, and I did better with him than I do with Murphy. We each took one.

I went over to the bar and Murphy said, "Do any better?"

"Yeah," I said. "He plays with pieces that aren't there, too." Murphy laughed at that.

It was about ten when I left. I didn't have to be downtown until midnight, but I still had to change into my uniform. My gun and my black shoes were still at my apartment.

Eleven found me on the streetcar, still feeling good from the beer but knowing that the letdown was coming. It hit me hard around Lee Circle. The night air coming in through the open window helped some but not much. My throat wanted more beer but the streetcar was taking me to work, and in half an hour it would be morning again.

Shirley works the early shift. She's a petite, mannish woman in her middle twenties who lives in the French Quarter. She was waiting for me at the basement desk.

"Hi, Mike. You're here early." She was right by fifteen minutes.

"You know how it is. I'm a man who loves his work."

"Yeah." She was getting up to go. "What do you think of Timmy's handiwork?" The cross was sitting on the desk. I guess Timmy had left it so his aunt wouldn't find it and spoil the surprise.

"Words escape me," I said, and they just barely did. I didn't feel much like talking.

"Well, you have a good night."

"Right," I said. "You, too."

"Oh, yeah—" she stopped at the door. "A couple of guys are working late on the third floor. That oil guy."

"Cunningham?"

"Yeah. And some young guy—a real hunk."

"I've seen him." I gave her the closest thing to a meaningful look that I could manage on such short notice.

"Eh," she said. "Not my type," and she was out the door.

I made my first round at twelve fifteen. I make one round an hour and they tell you to vary the time from night to night. I didn't bother the guys on the third floor. By twelve forty-five I had keyed all my stations and was back at the desk. I lit a cigarette and began waiting for one fifteen when I would do it over again. I started to put my feet up, but Timmy's cross was in the way. I slid it across the desktop and then got curious and picked it up. Timmy had found time to cut the cursive letters a little deeper; you could see three layers of lami-

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nation. His aunt would like it all right.

I heard the shots at that moment. It was about twelve fifty.

There were four of them, evenly spaced, methodical. I knew by the sound that the last three probably weren't necessary. I unsnapped my holster, hit the police alarm switch by the door, and started up the stairs with my gun in my hand. There are two sets of stairs, one on each side of the building, so there was an even chance of meeting someone on the way up. I was betting he wouldn't try the elevator.

On the third floor I reached for the doorknob with my left hand and noticed I was still holding Timmy's cross. I guess I'd been in a hurry. I felt pretty stupid for a second, then I thought of something. Slowly, I turned the doorknob to the open position, then hooked the cross over it, pulling just hard enough to keep the knob from slipping back and latching the door. Then I grabbed the base of the cross, got as far from the door as I could, and pulled. The door opened slowly toward me, and I was out of the way of any lead someone might want to put through the door.

I opened it all the way without incident and peeked around. Street light from the picture window at the end of the hall showed me I was alone. Halfway between me and the window, a thin strip of light showed at the bottom of an impressive mahogany door. I'd made enough rounds of that building to know that the gilt letters on the door said "Cunningham and Associates."

Thick carpet made my footsteps silent as I moved down the hall. I used the cross to open the mahogany door, too, only this time I jerked it open, hoping to get a reaction that would give the man inside away. There was no reaction. I held the door open with my foot and threw the cross hard. It clattered against the wall, then landed silently on the carpet. There was no other sound for thirty seconds. I ventured a look around the door. Nobody looked back.

The offices of Cunningham and Associates took up half the third floor, but only two rooms were lit: the reception area and an office in the back, at the end of a long hall. That office would be Cunningham's. Between me and it were four open doorways that led to smaller offices—four open, dark doorways, two on each side, that could hide a man with a gun, a man who had already fired four shots. Common sense told me to wait, that whatever was in that office at the end of the hall would still be there when the police showed up.

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But you don't get to be a security guard on the graveyard shift by having a lot of common sense. There was a light switch on the right at the beginning of the hall. I pressed my back against the wall, pointed my gun at the open door to Cunningham's office, and flipped the switch. Light chased shadows out of the hallway and made the four doorways a little less dark. The switch was the silent type, and no sound came after it.

I moved down the hall. The doorways were staggered, a nice architectural touch I could have done without. A quick step would take me past the first doorway on the left and put me in front of the doorway on the right.

I took two quick silent steps. Blood hammered in my head, but no shots rang out. Two more slow steps brought me to the second set of doorways. Two more quick steps took me past them.

I could see about two-thirds of Cunningham's office through the open door. The part I couldn't see was on the right. Once again common sense failed me. I held my gun in front of me with both hands and sidestepped into the office.

My gun pointed at a dead man.

There wasn't much blood, but there was plenty of everything else. The first shot had killed him and thrown him back against a wall map of Louisiana oil leases. The next three shots had spread pieces of him around the room, bits of torn flesh and crushed bone that glistened in the harsh neon light. There was just enough left of his face that I recognized the good-looker I'd seen with Cunningham the morning before.

I lowered my gun and knelt down. On the floor at my feet were four spent shells, .357 magnum. Whoever did it had stopped to reload before taking off. That meant he had thought there was at least a chance of having to deal with me on the way out. Another look at the dead man told me that the murderer didn't mind using his big gun. I'm as sociable as the next guy, but I was glad we hadn't met.

One wall of Cunningham's office was a window facing Poydras. The overhead light made the window a mirror reflecting me and a dead guy who might have been the world's handsomest man. Looking at the reflection made me feel far away. I was somewhere else, watching myself do all this. I walked over to the window, cupped my left hand over my eyes, and looked out. I guessed it had been about five minutes since I set off the police alarm. There were no blue-and-whites out

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front. I left the dead man and went back down the hall to the reception area, where I dialed the police emergency number. After three rings there was a voice on the other end.

"Police."

"Yeah. This is Mike Prophet calling from 1011 Poydras. I set off the security alarm about five minutes ago."

"Just a moment, please." There was a click and I was on hold. Then another click and the voice came back: "Yes, Mr. Prophet, we show your alarm on the panel here. Are you having any trouble?"

"Things aren't *too* bad. There's been a murder and the killer may still be in the building, but I doubt that he'll come back here. The guy he wanted is pretty good and dead. His career as a matinee idol is over. Today was the last day of his future . . . " I was talking fast, releasing tension with each word, and I guess I sounded a little crazy because there was a pause at the other end of the line when I finally stopped.

Then the voice said, "Just a minute now, you say there's been a murder?"

"Right. On the third floor of 1011 Poydras. If you'll just send some men down I'll be glad to let them in the front door."

When I hung up the phone I could hardly stand the quiet. In the hallway outside the mahogany door, something made me feel odd, as if I were being watched, but no one was there. I went down the stairs to the lobby and waited for the police.

They weren't long in coming. Their riot lights were flashing, and their siren screamed. I let them in.

"You Prophet?" one of them said.

"Right. Come with me." They did, and that was just the beginning. Cops and detectives and coroners were coming and going the rest of the night. They asked all kinds of questions, and they searched the building eight times. This was no mugging on Camp Street. This was big time murder, with motives and intrigue and rich businessmen. A detective and two cops went over to Lou Cunningham's house. It seems that he and the dead guy, whose name was Charles Doyle, had come by the office after having dinner at the Hilton nearby. That was at nine thirty. Cunningham had left at eleven, was home by eleven twenty. Doyle had stayed on to work late. It seemed he was a new golden-boy lawyer Cunningham had hired.

The detectives had me call Shirley, and over the phone she verified what parts of Cunningham's story she could. Both men had checked in with her at nine thirty—that was written

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in the logbook we keep at the desk—but Cunningham hadn't bothered to check with her when he left. That wasn't odd in itself; he was a busy man and there was still someone in his office. Doyle could check out whenever he got done; only someone had checked Doyle out a little early.

There were no signs of forcible entry anywhere in the building, so the killer either had a passkey or had been let in by Cunningham—or Doyle. No one had come in before Shirley left. The detectives talked all this around while I let the cleanup people in and out. They didn't have much use for me after I'd told my story for the fifth time. Later, reporters showed up, including one television crew with a mini-cam. The body was gone by then, and most of the mess had been mopped up, but they got some great shots of a cleaning lady working on the carpet and I gave a short interview. This foolishness kept up the rest of the night. Along about seven I went back to the basement to put my feet up and wait for eight o'clock.

I was thinking about what a pain it was going to be to tell the whole story to Timmy when I realized I'd left his damn cross upstairs. I hadn't bothered to tell the cops how I'd used it to open doors—I'd forgotten all about it. I was sick of climbing those stairs, but I did it one more time.

I got up there and it seemed like years had passed since I'd opened that door with a plywood cross so I could keep out of the way of flying lead. This time I opened the door with my hand. The main hallway was lighted up by the morning sun, and a cop was standing outside the Cunningham offices. I walked over to where the cross had landed silently in the thick carpet.

It wasn't there.

I turned to the cop: "Listen, you didn't see anyone pick up a plywood cross did you?" He looked at me like I was crazy. I didn't blame him, but I tried again: "The maintenance man in the building was making it for his aunt. I left it up here last night in all the commotion"

"I ain't seen nothin' like that, pal. Hey, you had a long night. Maybe you oughta go home and get some sleep."

"Yeah, right. I just gotta check this out." I went past him into the reception area. Two cleaning women were drinking coffee. They weren't any more help than the cop: "No, honey, I ain' seen no cross 'roun hea." I looked with no success. I was starting to feel as crazy as I must have looked. I went back downstairs. Someone must have picked it up, put it somewhere.

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But who and where? It was odd enough—a plywood cross in that plush outer hallway—that the cops would have noticed it, asked about it. And it was weird enough that the television people would have built their whole story around it.

Yet nothing like that had happened.

I tried to run the night through my head one more time. It seemed long ago, fuzzy and unreal, but I did remember what I'd felt coming out that mahogany door on my way to let the cops in.

I'd felt odd, as if someone had been watching me, only no one was there.

The cross might not have been there either.

I couldn't be sure; I hadn't noticed at the time that it was missing, but neither did I remember seeing it. I reached for the phone and dialed the police. I told them who I was and asked to speak to the detective in charge of the case. It took a while, but I finally got someone on the line who knew what was going on.

"Yeah, Prophet, what is it?"

"Well, I'm not sure it's anything, but I remembered something I didn't tell you earlier this morning."

"Go ahead."

I did. I told him about Timmy and his cross and how I'd managed to carry it upstairs with me, how I opened doors with it and bounced it off the wall and left it lying on the carpet, and how it was gone now and I couldn't find it anywhere. He listened through my whole story and he was very understanding. He told me to go home and get some sleep.

I hung up the phone and looked at my watch. Timmy would be there in ten minutes. I wanted a drink and a lot of sleep. I wanted time to think about all this and I wanted out of my damn uniform. I wanted lots of things, but one thing I didn't want was the job of explaining to Timmy what had happened to the cross he had made for his aunt.

I left. It seemed like the thing to do.

Max was at his station when I passed through the lobby, acting like he didn't see me, chewing on that cigar that might have been a puppy's mistake in another life. I asked Max if he believed in reincarnation.

"What's 'at?" he said. He didn't look up from his paper.

"Reincarnation," I said. "When you die and come back as something else."

"No, no. I ain't studying no reincarnation."

"Me neither. But last night I found a guy on the third floor who was trying to come back as corned-beef hash."

The cigar hit the floor and

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was a puppy's mistake again but I missed it. I was out the door and back in the New Orleans heat.

I woke up around four in the afternoon, surrounded by old sweat and empty beer bottles. A shower took care of the sweat. I felt my face and decided I could go another day without a shave. I dried off, lit a cigarette, and let the new sweat get started while I dressed. On the corner at the end of the block I got a roast beef po' boy and the daytime edition of the *Times-Picayune*. The Poydras Street murder was front page news. I carried the paper and the sandwich to the Maple Leaf where I could drink while I ate and read.

I never got past the headlines. Jack Lucas, my chess-playing reporter friend, was waiting for me. Murphy was with him. They dragged me over to a table, and between bites of roast beef and gulps of beer, I told my story. Jack listened with wide eyes. Murphy drank his beer and mumbled "stupid" under his breath when I got to the part about the dark staggered doorways. I told them about carrying the cross around, too, just for comic relief. When I finished, Jack started with his questions.

"What do you know about Cunningham?"

"Not much. Big oil money. For all I know he's a pretty good guy. I only know him through the maintenance man in the building—Timmy, the guy with the cross. Cunningham got Timmy his job." Something in my brain clicked when I said that, but it didn't click very loud. I lit a cigarette, and Jack kept talking.

"It's generally thought that Cunningham's a little shady, but that might be sour grapes. He's made his money fast. What do you know about Charles Doyle?"

"Not a thing."

"Young bright boy from Dallas, not long out of Southern Methodist Law. He'd only been with Cunningham a couple months. You get a chance to read this yet?" He pointed at the paper.

"Nope. Just got up."

"The police are talking about Arab terrorists with interest in Louisiana oil, and lots of other nonsense. What it means is they don't have the slightest idea who did it or why."

Murphy, the retired cop, spoke up: "And why do you give a damn?"

Jack is young and brash and he came right out with it. "Ambition, Murphy. If I get lucky and come up with something here, it means a break from covering shopping mall openings in Gretna." Murphy's grunting noises made it clear what he

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thought of Jack's ambition.

Right then a cheer came up from the bar, and the crowd there started calling my name. The five o'clock news was on television. Jack and I walked over to where we could see. Murphy stayed at the table with his beer.

It was the news all right, and I was a star. The bright TV lights made me look even more ragged than usual, and I was saying things that sounded crazy even to me. The guys at the bar loved it. Then there was an interview with Cunningham, who talked about the tragic loss of a bright young man. They'd caught him coming out of his house on his way to work, and his wife was at his side. The story wrapped up with speculation about Arab terrorists and a short interview with one of the detectives I had talked to the night before.

The thought of spending the rest of the afternoon and evening listening to bad jokes about security guards didn't appeal, so I told Jack I was going to do the rest of my drinking at home. He tagged along.

We made a pretty good dent in a case of beer before I had to go to work, but neither one of us came up with any new ideas. To tell the truth, I was getting pretty tired of listening to Jack try. The facts we had didn't lead anywhere. When it got to be around eleven thirty, I talked Jack into giving me a ride to work. He was real quiet driving downtown, and that suited me fine. He pulled up in front of 1011 Poydras, and I started to get out.

"Mike, listen." His voice seemed to come from far away. I leaned back into the car and waited. I could see his face in the dim light from the dashboard. It was serious, earnest—a reporter's face after he's got himself liquored up and before he's been a reporter too long to care.

"Mike, this could be a break for you, too. Solve this and it could mean something better than a graveyard shift security job. You can build a reputation on something like this."

"I'll keep that in mind," I said, and closed the door. I hate people talking that way. It used to happen all the time, years ago. Then it was my elders trying to order my life. These days it's younger people who try to get me going. I spend a lot of time convincing people that I never wanted the things I don't have.

Shirley was waiting for me at the basement desk. "Hey, star! I caught you on the news!"

"Yeah. It's hell on a private dick to get that kind of press. Ruins your anonymity."

"Right," she said. "Any ideas who did it?"

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"Not a one. I'm just glad he didn't get me." I don't know what made me say that. I'm not at all sure it was true. People who are worried about getting shot don't pass dark doorways near the scenes of recent murders. Maybe Shirley didn't think it rang true either, but whatever she thought, she stopped getting ready to go and looked at me with that same serious face Jack had worn in the car.

"Listen, Mike, are you all right? You look a little run down."

"Yeah, I'm fine. I always look a little run down. It's part of my charm, part of being a star."

"Well—okay. Just take it easy, huh?" She started for the door.

"Right," I said. Then I thought of something. "Shirley. Did you see Timmy today?"

"No, I didn't. He was gone before I got here. It's his aunt's birthday, remember? He took the afternoon off."

"Right. I forgot about that."

"Yeah, Timmy's good to his aunt. Sets a great example for us all. See you later, Mike."

"You bet."

I sat down, put my feet up on the desk, and lit a cigarette. I told myself I was tired of thinking about the whole mess, but I knew it was a lie. For one thing, I hadn't been thinking about it. I'd been watching and listening and drinking while other people thought about it. I'd been doing my best not to think about anything.

So, just for a change, I started thinking. I watched curtains of cigarette smoke twist toward the ceiling, and I let my thoughts curl with the smoke. Once an hour I made my rounds, and I let my thoughts follow me up and down stairs and along dim carpeted hallways. By three o'clock I had sobered up, and by six I had it figured out. It didn't make a lot of sense, but that fit right in: the night before I'd been chasing a murderer with a gun in my right hand and a plywood cross in my left. It was six fifteen when I got Jack Lucas on the phone. "You awake, Jack?" I said. He mumbled something ugly about my relationship with my mother. "Good," I said. "Be here by seven thirty if you want your story." He said he would and hung up. I made another round of the building, just to clear my head. Jack was there by seven fifteen.

"What you got?" he said.

"Never mind. Just sit in that chair in the corner and pay attention. I'm gonna make you as famous as me." Jack showered me with questions and complaints, but I was mum. I propped my feet on the desk, and the room was good and smoky by the time Timmy walked in. He had his tool box,

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and he was charged up, as usual.

"Hey, Mike! How y'at?"

"Just about there, Timmy. How was your aunt's birthday?"

"Oh, real good. She hadda self a real good time." He set the tool box on the desk and opened it.

My next line was a scorcher.

"That's nice, Timmy. She like the cross you made for her?"

"Yeah! She loved it! She forgot all about dat toaster oven she wanted when she saw dat cross! I'm tellin' ya."

I didn't say another word. Timmy fiddled for a moment with his tools, then looked up. Our eyes were locked when Jack shouted, "Gun!"

I pushed hard with my feet and tumbled backward. The desk went the other way and caught Timmy across the thighs just as he squeezed the trigger. I caught a faceful of splinters from the desk, but no lead. A second shot came from Jack's direction and Timmy groaned. The big .357 magnum hit the floor. Jack's bullet had caught Timmy in the left shoulder, and Timmy had dropped his gun to grab the wound. He was sobbing quietly. I got up and turned to Jack.

"I didn't know you carried a heater," I said.

"Everyone does, these days." He didn't sound too happy about it. I stepped around the desk and picked up Timmy's gun.

"Timmy. Why didn't you leave the cross in the hallway?"

"I dunno, Mike. I jus' couldn't. Dat cross was fa ma aunt. I jus' couldn't leave it in there near dat dead guy. It didn't seem right." Then he looked up at me and without a trace of hate in his voice said, "I shoulda blown you away when I hadda chance."

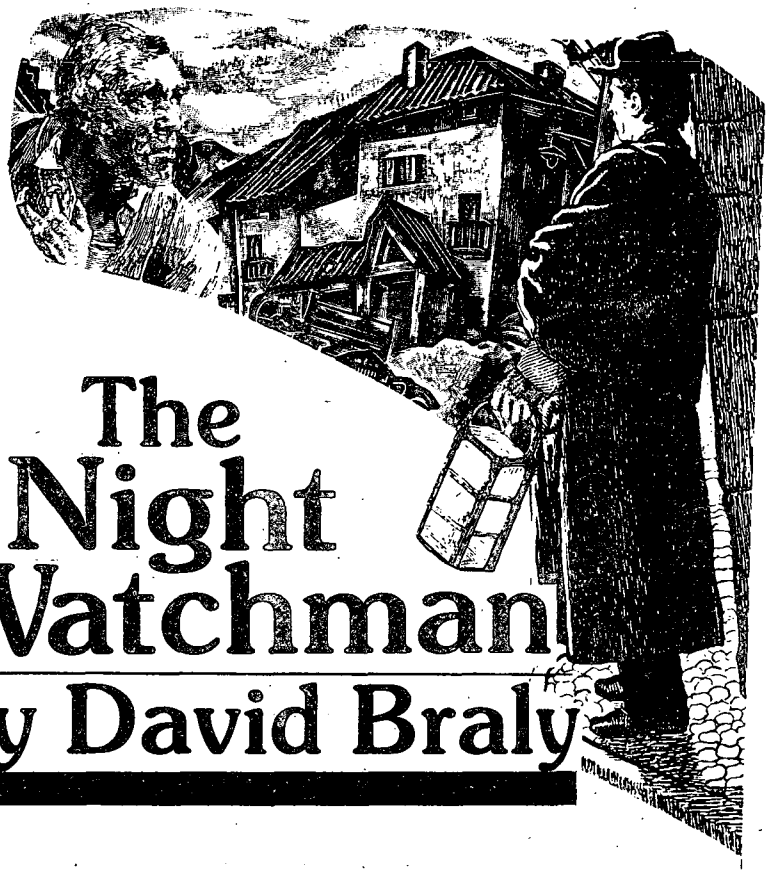
"I'm glad you didn't," I said, and I meant it. I didn't ask him which dark office he'd hidden in. Sometimes it's better not to know.

Jack got his story. It seems the Timmy had been doing odd jobs for Cunningham, mostly in the line of industrial sabotage. Charles Doyle, the golden-boy lawyer from Texas, had found out a little more about Timmy than Cunningham wanted him to know and was trying to get a little more than Cunningham wanted him to have. It was a simple shakedown case, and once Jack knew where to look, it didn't take him long to break things open. All he had to do was play with the pieces in front of him.

Me? I still work the graveyard shift and I still play chess with Murphy at the Maple Leaf in the afternoons. And Murphy still beats me. Some guys never learn. It's part of their charm.

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FICTION



The Night Watchman

by David Braly

He had walked the sidewalks of Sawyerville at night for as long as anyone could remember. He never hurried, never strolled, just proceeded in a slow but businesslike manner from one door to the next, turning each knob to make sure that every store in town was safely locked. To think of Sawyerville at night without thinking of its watchman was impossible.

Illustration by Marc Yankus

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And yet, while he was familiar to everyone, it was as an old building or weathered face is familiar, not as is a living, breathing person. People readily recognized his tall, lean figure, his slouching wide-brim hat, his low-strapped holster and gun, and his long, lead-handled flashlight. They knew his lumbering walk, his habit of staying close to the walls, within the shadows. They were familiar with all these things about him, but not with the man himself.

Somebody must have interviewed him for the job, must have shown him around the town when he first arrived, but no one could remember who. For in the whole town of Sawyerville, there was not one man or woman who claimed personal knowledge of the watchman. Where he lived and what his name was were as unknown as were his origins and past life. No one claimed him as their kin, friend, or acquaintance. No one could say what color his clothes or hat might be, although almost everyone assumed they were dark colors, just as they assumed that his skin, eyes, and hair were dark. His features were unknown, his face forever hidden by the night and by the slouching brim of his hat. In fact, there was even an argument about his features in the Golden Star Tavern one night in 1964. One man claimed that the watchman looked like Jimmy Stewart, another said that he resembled Anthony Quinn.

After that argument, when men saw the night watchman making his rounds they looked closely, trying to see the features of his face. But the night and the slouching hat and the distance prevented them. Perhaps if they'd walked up to the watchman they might have seen his face. And yet no man ever approached him. Nor, by some coincidence, was any person ever approached by the watchman, although he never appeared to avoid anyone. Every night he followed his route down the dark sidewalks and back alleys and no person ever happened to be directly on that route either by accident or by design.

What annoyed people about the watchman was that he wasn't satisfied to walk that route. He could and did go anywhere he wanted, and no one knew from one night to the next where he might be. Old men staggering out of the taverns on Main Street would see a shadow moving against a building on the opposite side of the street and think that it was he. Young men whistling as they walked home from the bordello on the edge of town would suddenly feel that they were being watched, and they would think

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that he was there, somewhere, in the night. Women hurrying down the dark sidewalks would feel his eyes following them. Teenagers sneaking down the deserted alleys after curfew would suddenly notice that the watchman was standing in the distance, looking at them. Small children were afraid to venture out of their yards after dusk, fearing an encounter with him, and they would imagine that every movement in the darkness was he.

For all that, the watchman was never a subject of much speculation or conversation. He was there, he'd always been there, people wondered who he was and where he lived, and that was all.

However, there was one person in Sawyerville who wondered more than the others about the watchman. Even as a child Thomas Perkins had wondered. He continued to wonder as an adult. His curiosity increased, and occasionally he voiced it to his friends in the bank or at whatever tavern he happened to be patronizing.

Thomas Perkins was the last member of one of Sawyerville's pioneer families. Amos Perkins, his great-grandfather, had come there from Missouri in 1878. He had originally ranched on land nearby, but over a period of many years he had by hard work and cunning opportunism built for himself and his family a great enterprise based upon land and livestock but also embracing several mercantile stores, two gold mines, and a freight line. The Perkins fief was shattered by the Great Depression, and by the time Thomas Perkins inherited its ruins, all that remained was five hundred acres of land along the creek, leased to a neighboring farmer, and a half interest in an abandoned cinnabar mine inhabited by bats.

There also remained the faded green three story house on Walton Street, its steep grey roof and half-dozen chimneys towering above the nearby elms and the neighboring houses. A meter-high fence of slender green pickets enclosed its yard, that was planted with shrubs instead of grass. Thomas Perkins lived there alone. The only other person who ever went into the house was the old cleaning woman who busied herself there every day while Perkins was at the bank, where he had secured employment as a cashier. Early in the evening, after the sun had gone down but before the sky had blackened, Perkins would sit in his chair atop the high, covered porch of the big house, a tall, thin young man with black hair and piercing brown eyes who was overdressed in a blue three-piece suit, looking out at the front gate, at Walton Street, and out toward the center of town that was half a mile away and obscured by the

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nearby houses and trees.

When night came, Perkins would walk the several blocks to the taverns on Main, or drive his beat-up old Chevy to one of those at the edge of town. There he would drink whisky and talk with other men. Usually he talked about sports, politics, or local affairs, sometimes he talked gossip, and occasionally he talked about the watchman. Rarely his subject was the watchman, yet he talked more than any other man about him.

As time passed, Thomas Perkins warmed to his subject. Each year he talked more about him than the previous year, until men noticed that speculating about the watchman had become his favorite activity. His talk increased their own curiosity about the watchman, but mostly it caused them to wonder about Perkins himself, about why he was so absorbed in the subject.

Eventually the cashier became obsessed by the watchman. Never an evening passed that Perkins didn't mention him at some tavern. His attitude, the way he would spring mention of him into any conversation on the slightest pretext, revealed the depth of his obsession. It was clear to almost everyone who knew Thomas Perkins that the young man was thinking about the watchman during the whole of his days, and possibly dreaming about him at night. Old friends avoided him because they were tired of hearing his pointless speculation, and one or two men were heard to say that they feared Perkins was losing his mind.

Perkins probably noticed that he was driving away his friends. But apparently he could not stop himself. And their indifference to the mystery annoyed him.

"What's the matter with you people?" he exploded one night. "Don't you understand? Don't you see how strange it is? As long as the oldest people in this town can remember, that night watchman has always been making his rounds. Don't you realize how old he has to be?"

"Now, Tom," said his friend Carl Lockwood. "We both know that the watchman those old folks remember and this man can't be the same fellow. There must have been another one before this man."

"When was the current watchman hired?"

"I don't know."

"And who does he work for?"

"Why, the merchants of course."

Thomas Perkins wasn't satisfied by these answers. During his

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spring break in 1981 he decided to conduct his own, private investigation. It involved going through the files of the *Sawyerville News* and the records of the municipal and county governments, as well as his questioning people of knowledge and authority in the sheriff's department, the Sawyerville police department, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Sawyerville Merchants Association. What he learned was that there was no record or recollection of *anyone's* having ever hired the watchman.

Perkins reported his findings to his friends and to others who were willing to listen. Almost everyone he talked to expressed interest, but no one appeared to be alarmed by what he had discovered. Carl Lockwood listened attentively while Perkins revealed his findings, then shrugged his shoulders and suggested that Perkins write a letter about it to the editor of the newspaper.

Herb Sudbury had a better suggestion. Sudbury was a short, heavyset, bald man in his early sixties who had once been a millworker but who now did all sorts of odd jobs around town in order to earn enough money to pay for his shabby second floor room at one of the old boarding houses on Thompson Street and an inadequate supply (to his own way of thinking) of whisky. Sudbury was also the father of the girl Perkins had almost married and one of the few friends he had who for brief moments could halfway match his interest in the mystery of the watchman. And his suggestion to Perkins was simple: "Let's follow him and see where he goes."

The next night Perkins and Sudbury huddled together beneath the bridge that spanned the creek. From his investigation Perkins knew that many nights the bridge was the last place where the watchman had been seen. And so they waited there, listening for footfalls on the pedestrian walk above, hearing for the most part only the creek water splashing over rocks. Occasionally they did hear someone walking on the bridge. When they did, Perkins would sneak out onto the south bank where he would stare from behind a bush until he was certain that the person he was looking at was not the watchman.

Finally, at eleven o'clock, Perkins recognized through the leaves of the bush the tall, lean, hatted figure of the watchman. He turned east after he left the bridge, walking down the narrow road that bordered the north bank. Perkins slipped back under the bridge, where he whispered to Sudbury that their quarry had arrived. Sudbury, sober for once, only reluctantly followed Perkins up the

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north bank and onto the road.

Just as they stepped onto the road, the watchman turned full around and switched on his flashlight, pinning Perkins and Sudbury in its beam.

"He sees us," gasped Sudbury.

"Stay calm."

"Calm, nothing. Man-oh-man!"

Perkins stared into the light. He didn't move.

Sudbury moved, but not much. He looked down at the bank, calculating his chances if he tried to escape. He knew that he was old and weak, that he could never outrun any man who had a reservoir of strength, and still less could he outrun a bullet. He remained where he was, anxious to flee but afraid to move.

Perkins started walking toward the watchman.

"What're you doing?" whispered Sudbury.

"I'm going up to him and look him right in the eye."

"Are you crazy? Come back . . . Tom, . . . Tom!"

But Perkins continued to walk down the leafy road toward the watchman, eighty feet distant from Sudbury. Soon Perkins was so close that his body shielded Sudbury from the flashlight beam.

Sudbury stared, horrified, afraid to speak or to move. All that he could see was the shrinking black form of Perkins's back, outlined by the watchman's light. All that he could hear was the splashing waters of the creek and a gentle breeze swaying the upper branches of the elms and willows that lined its banks.

Suddenly the light disappeared.

Sudbury assumed that either Perkins was now so close to it that his bulk completely blocked it out or else the watchman had switched it off. Eventually he decided that the latter had happened. No matter how close Perkins was to the flashlight some of the light would be visible unless the watchman had switched it off.

Sudbury squinted in an effort to see what was happening. He could almost make out the form of Perkins standing on the road, but the watchman wasn't visible. The night was late, and dark, and its blackness was alleviated only by the quarter moon, the stars, and the light that came from the windows of a few houses on the other side of the creek through the elms and willows.

For ten minutes Sudbury waited for something to happen. Nothing did. And during the time of his wait his panic subsided, until finally it vanished altogether. He came to believe that Thomas

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Perkins and the watchman were standing on the road ahead talking to each other, maybe even having a good laugh about the way the cashier had thought the watchman so strange and mysterious. Yes, and he, Sudbury, was missing the conversation.

He began walking down the road, slowly at first but faster after he got his legs working good. He walked toward the black form of Perkins's back, listening for the conversation, for the laughs, but hearing only the splashing water and the swaying leaves.

Sudbury was less than ten feet from Perkins before he realized that the cashier was alone.

When he did reach him, he found Perkins staring straight ahead, wide-eyed, his mouth half-open and his face immobile.

"Where is he? Tom? Where's the watchman? . . . What happened? . . . Tom? . . . What's wrong? . . . Tom!"

Thomas Perkins never said a word to Herb Sudbury. And, although he did recover his ability to speak during the months that followed, he refused to talk about what had happened on the tree-shadowed road.

The watchman made his rounds as usual the following night, and all the nights that came after. Several police officers were heard to say that he would be questioned about what had happened the night Perkins suffered his breakdown, but they never did get around to doing it. Certainly no one else has tried to question or even approach the watchman, who still makes his nightly rounds down the sidewalks and back alleys of Sawyerville.

And most certain of all is the fact that Perkins has never again confronted him. He was released from the Portland hospital in October, 1982. He was rehired by the bank, but for shorter hours. Neither there, nor at the taverns, which he visits now only infrequently, will he discuss the night he met the watchman nor the watchman himself. Knowing that he went through a terrible year and a half after that meeting, no one ever talks about those things in his presence.

However, everyone believes that while Thomas Perkins, wearing his blue three-piece suit, sits on his chair on the porch of his huge, faded green house watching the arrival of dusk, he is thinking about one particular night in the spring of 1981—and about the watchman.

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FICTION



The Captain and Mr. Tuttle

by Joel Helgerson

A cannon blast marked the start of the race; one hundred and fifty thousand spectators hurrahed; the steamboats *Milwaukee F&P* and the *Smoke and Mist* of Chicago cut loose their paddle wheels and shoveled on the coal. Not since the *Tashmoo* versus the *City of Erie* race of 1900 three years before had so much money been wagered on a steamboat race.

On the bridge of the *Milwaukee Freight and Passenger*, Captain Vanherzeele hooted orders. His voice boomed especially loud because a witness from the *Smoke and Mist* stood beside him. The witness didn't seem riveted by the captain's dramatics, however. Instead, he repeatedly disappeared to the top deck to send and receive messages, via carrier pigeon, to and from the *Smoke and*

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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Mist. That action nagged at the captain as if a plot to destroy his ship were being hatched on his own bridge. Each time the witness disappeared, Captain Vanherzeele became a distant quiet, which had his bridge crew tiptoeing.

When the witness returned, the captain shouted down the tube to the engine room. "Now! I vant de steam now. Dis ship must moeven vid all haste!"

The Dutch captain was a formidable sight when excited. He no longer stooped to listen to what a crewman said; he stood his full six feet nine inches. His English lapsed towards Dutch, but everyone strained to understand him without having to ask a second time, for his temper was nearly as famous as his height. Again he shouted down the tube, "Vhat is de troebel down dere? Shoven de coal, you devils. Shoven de coal!"

Yet the witness from the *Smoke and Mist*, Mr. Baily Tuttle, remained in a good humor. After all, not only was the *Smoke and Mist* a streamlined luxury liner while the *Milwaukee F&P* was designed to haul freight, but the *Smoke and Mist* had won the coin toss and taken the advantage of the outside position where deeper water allowed greater bite for the paddle wheel.

When Captain Vanherzeele told Tuttle that smiling was forbidden on his bridge, Baily Tuttle rocked on the balls of his feet and said, "You freighters have been bragging for years about your speed. Now we shall see. I fully expect to smile all the eighty-seven miles to Milwaukee."

The two men were as dissimilar as the two ships. Baily Tuttle was small and expensively dressed; his arrogance made him seem untrustworthy. From the captain's viewpoint, expensive as the cut of Baily Tuttle's clothes was, they didn't fit him properly; and slender as Baily Tuttle's fingers were, they had dirt under the fingernails. Then, too, Baily Tuttle was constantly climbing to the top deck to release a carrier pigeon. That proviso of the race agreement nagged at Captain Vanherzeele more than the witness himself, for the captain couldn't fathom why the *Smoke and Mist* insisted on the right to send and receive messages. And they sent so many messages back and forth! The captain's witness on the bridge of the *Smoke and Mist* sent one message. "You're falling behind."

"Boonhead!" the captain shouted as he crumpled the message and threw it at the *Smoke and Mist*, a quarter mile to starboard.

At one mile out, the steamboats had been dead even. At five

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miles the *Smoke and Mist* had captured a few foot lead, due largely to the advantage of deeper water for its paddle wheel. When Baily Tuttle once again climbed to the top deck, Captain Vanherzeele said to the second wheelman, "Readen de book to us." And the second wheelman pulled out a well thumbed Bible.

At the turn of the century there arose between the cities of Milwaukee and Chicago a rivalry over which city would grow the faster. The steamboat race symbolized this rivalry, and drew boosters and heavy bettors from each city.

The trial of the two ships had brewed since the steamboat race of 1900 when the freighter named the *City of Erie* had defeated the passenger ship *Tashmoo*. Steamboat sailors on the Great Lakes were proud, brave men whose loyalty to their ships was complete. In spite of the *City of Erie's* victory, the question of which design offered more speed remained unanswered for those sailors who admired the sleek lines of the excursion ship *Tashmoo*.

The *Smoke and Mist* first challenged the *Milwaukee F&P* through the newspapers. The owners of the *Milwaukee F&P* were reluctant. First, they preferred pointing to the *Tashmoo* versus the *City of Erie* race when questions of speed arose. Second, the owners of the *Smoke and Mist* had developed an unsavory reputation for doing what was necessary to succeed. Among freight shippers, the consensus was that the *Smoke and Mist* wanted to race in order to boost sagging passenger sales. The owners of the *Smoke and Mist*, they said, desired publicity and did not care at all about speed, but freight lines thrived or went bankrupt depending on speed and timetables.

What eventually convinced the owners of the *Milwaukee F&P* to race was a Milwaukee newspaper story claiming that the two ships had found themselves on parallel courses and had run, for twenty miles, an unofficial race, which the *F&P* handily lost. Chicago newspapers picked the story up. The amount of truth to the story could have passed through a keyhole and not scraped its sides, but the fact that a Milwaukee newspaper had released the story was damaging. The *F&P's* reputation as the A-1 ship on Lake Michigan was curdling, and with a loss of status, the owners feared a loss in revenue. But now, when the *F&P* demanded a race, the *Smoke and Mist* backpedaled until the clause including the witness and the carrier pigeons was agreed on.

Who wrote the story for the Milwaukee paper?

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The by-line read Baily Tuttle.

The measurements of the two ships favored the *Smoke and Mist*. It was a narrow, low, powerful ship that drew eight feet of water and carried half the tonnage of the *F&P*. The bulky *Milwaukee F&P* drew ten feet of water, had a grandiose freight hold, and room for six hundred passengers. But the *F&P* also had Captain Vanherzeele, who believed in preparing for every eventuality, whereas the *Smoke and Mist* believed it could rely completely on its superior design and subterfuge.

Captain Vanherzeele ordered his boilers overhauled with new piston ring springs in the high and low pressure cylinders. He had the coal supply hand picked to ensure prime fuel and no slate. He ordered a cofferdam constructed around the condenser, then stored ice in the cofferdam. This reduced the amount of water needed to cool the condenser, thus cutting the pump's load and conserving power. To cut wind resistance, flagpoles were taken down and lifeboats secured against bulwarks.

The *Smoke and Mist* took none of these precautions. Its one alteration for the race (except for a fresh painting) was a bypass valve feeding into the low pressure cylinders. Baily Tuttle, a man of many resources, designed and installed the bypass. For such ingenuity he was the darling of the Chicago owners.

As the two ships neared the forty mile point, several factors changed. The shoals were now portside of the *F&P* so that her larger paddle wheel could get a full bite. The wind began to pick up, which hampered the *Smoke and Mist* severely because it had taken no precautions with its many flagpoles or lifeboats. The *Milwaukee F&P* closed the gap; its thirty and one-half foot paddle wheel turned thirty-two times a minute and would soon pull them ahead.

"Vhere's da guest escapen to?" Captain Vanherzeele asked. He had turned around to ask Baily Tuttle what he thought of the latest developments. The *F&P* was again even with the *Smoke and Mist*. Tucking his hands under his armpits, Captain Vanherzeele made a flapping motion. "De pigeons?"

The messages Baily Tuttle had recently received from the *Smoke and Mist* would have increased Captain Vanherzeele's glee, for it wasn't just wind and water depth that changed the race. The bypass valve that Baily Tuttle had installed to increase pressure in the low pressure cylinders had backfired. Because he had included no provision for condensing the steam the bypass created, the net

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result now appeared to be a power loss. The *Smoke and Mist* wanted to know what to do. Baily Tuttle paced the top deck trying to brainstorm the answer.

On the bridge of the *F&P*, Captain Vanherzeele was explaining in detail how he would celebrate the victory. "Drinken de champagne. Yes indeedy."

At Kenosha, Wisconsin, thousands of spectators in pleasure craft waved and cheered the *F&P* on. It now had a one length lead, with thirty miles remaining. What the *Smoke and Mist* needed was a lucky break, and as the *F&P* approached the fifty mile mark, such a break happened. The *F&P* boilers began to lose pressure.

Captain Vanherzeele spotted the drop immediately. Into the steamroom tube he shouted, "Dis is no time for picnicken. Shoven de coal, you devils!" But five minutes later the pressure had dropped slightly lower; the paddle wheel now revolved twenty-eight times per minute.

"I'm to the steamroom," Captain Vanherzeele said. He added, "No vord of dis to de spy. When he return, I'm promenaden on de deck. Understanden?"

He took the steps three at a time and stopped to talk to no one who wanted to congratulate him on the turnabout of positions. In the steamroom he found his chief oilman cursing the boilers and shouting orders above the din. Captain Vanherzeele grabbed the oiler's chunky shoulders and shouted:

"Vhat's de troebel?"

"It's the danblasted Sickles cut-off valve. We're losing steam, and there's nothing we can do."

"I ordened dose valves ovenhauled!"

"And so they were, captain sir."

"Den vhat's de troebel?"

The oilman ruled his domain as tightly as the captain did the ship. Having the captain doubt his work angered the beefy oiler, who pointed at the captain and shouted:

"It's the adjustments that engineer you sent down here did. That's what the problem is. We had everything running smoothly until then."

"I senten no engineer."

"A little man in coveralls. Handy with a wrench, he was. Hopped right up and monkeyed with that valve." And the oiler pointed to a valve the size of a kettle that had a steady pulse of steam escaping from it.

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"Vill she holden?" Captain Vanherzeele shouted. When he didn't like the oiler's answer, he shouted, "Shoven de coal, you devils."

With curses and desperation, Captain Vanherzeele raced back to the bridge to view the *F&P's* position. "Trouble below?" Baily Tuttle asked hopefully.

The look of suspicion and distrust that Captain Vanherzeele gave Tuttle would have frightened most men, but Baily Tuttle had more than a dash of gall. "When this race is done, I'll be a vastly richer man," Tuttle said.

Captain Vanherzeele ignored him. He needed time to consider possibilities. To his second wheelman he said, "Readen from de book." Hearing the Bible read out loud had helped the captain concentrate ever since he'd been a young farm boy in Holland. In his mind, he visualized the leaking valve and what could possibly be done to fix it. At fifteen miles from Milwaukee, with his short lead cut in half, it came to the captain that if the valve could be held down with weight, the pressure loss would be cut. But how could he weight a valve that had a rod sliding in and out of its center? And how much weight would he need?

He didn't distinctly hear the second wheelman reading from the holy book, although he kept his head bowed to the floor as if in prayer. The musicality of the words lured his thoughts on. As he concentrated, his eyes drifted to the feet of Baily Tuttle, and it was then that inspiration and the possibility of justice struck him at once, for beneath Baily Tuttle's tailored pants legs he could see an edge of coarser material.

"Mr. Tuttle," Captain Vanherzeele suddenly said, "vould you be so kind as to comen vid me to de boiler room?"

"My duties as witness require . . . "

But Captain Vanherzeele ordered the second wheelman to help bring Mr. Tuttle to the boiler room by whatever means necessary. They each lifted an end of Baily Tuttle, who protested, "Put me down, you titans."

Once in the boiler room, the oiler was commanded to identify Baily Tuttle, which he did without hesitation. "That's him what tampered with my girl."

This much must be said for Baily Tuttle: he looked them square in their eyes and denied it all.

"How much do you veighen?" Captain Vanherzeele asked.

"I protest this treatment."

The captain stepped over and hefted him. "I'd gaugen him one

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hundred and fifty pounds."

And this much must be said for the crew of the *F&P*: When their captain commanded them to do something, they acted without hesitation.

"Taken dis man's coat and pants off. Ve vouldn't vant to ruin such a fine cut."

It took three men to disrobe Baily Tuttle; underneath the fine suit they found a greasy pair of coveralls.

"Ve needen one hundred and fifty pounds onto dat valve," Captain Vanherzeele said. "And you're dat one hundred and fifty pounds."

"That valve is scorching. I'll not do it."

Before he could protest further, Captain Vanherzeele lifted him up and set him on the valve. Immediately the escaping steam dropped to a minimal amount. And the crowd of angry sailors below Baily Tuttle meant that no matter how much his bottom tingled, if he didn't want to be quartered he'd stay where he was. They provided some cloth for underneath him, and assigned a deckhand to douse him with water whenever he called.

For the last fifteen miles of the race, Baily Tuttle hung on to the valve's oily reciprocating rod, shouting, "I'll sue. More water. I'll sue. More rags." But every time he tried climbing down, the head oiler chased him back up by waving a wrench.

Up above, the captain once again ordered the second wheelman to read from the book while the captain himself stood leaning forward as if to encourage his ship. Down the steamroom tube, he shouted, "Shoven all de coal, you devils. Ve almost dere."

The smokestacks of the ships filled the air with soot. A crowd of two hundred thousand waited to throw their hats in the air. The cannon blast signaled the end; thousands of straw hats sailed up.

The *F&P* won the race by a full thirty seconds that day, and when the reporters clambered aboard for their story, Captain Vanherzeele directed them to the boiler room where they found Baily Tuttle sitting on a tub of crushed ice.

"Dis is de man dat saven de day," said Captain Vanherzeele.

Of course, the city of Chicago went on to win the more important race, that of the leading Midwest business center. But the business community of Chicago never again listed amongst its kindred a Baily Tuttle. When last heard from in Milwaukee, Mr. Tuttle is believed to have said to a druggist, "Do you have any salve?"

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CASES ON FILE

Stolen Bullion of Indian Ridge

by John B. Marshall and Temple H. Cornelius



Kolburn & Cross

Safely cached away deep in the spruce forest adjacent to the Burnt Timber flats on Indian Ridge is a tidy little fortune of forty thousand dollars in the richest gold ore ever mined in the La Plata mountains. I helped to put it there years ago, when I was a teenage boy, and there it still remains.

During the summer seasons of 1909, 1910, and 1911, I was the foreman, caporal, and packer on my father's sheep outfit on the Hermosa side of the Indian Ridge a few miles east of the mining and railroad town of Rico, Colorado. The Indian Ridge was the name given to the divide between the watersheds of the Hermosa and the Dolores Rivers. It butted squarely up against the Cumberland Basin at the head of the La Plata River and extended north about forty miles to the Spanish peaks at the head of the Hermosa. This was a wild and untamed country then as now, uninhabited by anyone except an occasional stockman in the summer season, and by no one at all during the snowy wintertime.

Along the ridge ran an old Indian trail used by the Utes generations before the coming of the white men. It was one of

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my jobs to pack stock salt from the May Day switch, a spur of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad, on the La Plata River up over this old abandoned trail to our sheep outfit. It took a lot of salt for seven thousand ewes and their lambs eating the fresh, green forage, so my trips after salt were very frequent.

The Rio Grande Southern, known in railroad circles as "The Little Giant," was a famous narrow-gauge line through the rugged mountain country of southwestern Colorado. It was the connecting link between Durango on the south and Ridgway on the north, but between these two points it made a wide, circuitous swing west to the Dolores River and followed up that rugged mountain canyon to the famous mining camps of Rico, Ophir, Telluride, and others. The line of the railroad from May Day switch to Rico had about the same relation to the trail I followed as a bow would have to its string. The Indian trail was a cutoff between the two points.

The May Day switch was located on the Bar, a wide tableland on the west side of the La Plata River, opposite the famous mine of that name. A short distance upriver was the equally rich and famous Idaho mine. Both of these diggings were in plain view of the switch, and many were the miners that watched "the kid," as I was known, come and go with his pack string of burros. And on two different occasions, the kid saw miners stealing furtively along in the twilight through the scattered clumps of scrub oak, with a small sack of high-grade over their shoulders, to conceal it somewhere. Sometimes, when I was rounding up my jacks to pack them, I would accidentally find one of these caches where the wind had blown the protecting cover of oak leaves off it, but since I wanted to live a long life and not be crippled in the beginning of it, I very carefully left them alone. To molest some other man's highgrade was serious business, and I knew it. I did not want any serious business.

"Highgrade" and "highgrading" are technical terms known to the mining industry wherever rich ore is mined. Highgrading is the practice engaged in by some of the workmen of sorting out and appropriating to their own use and profit as many of the richest pieces of ore as they can get away with. In short, it is stealing ore. The ore so taken is "highgrade," but is usually known to the trade in each district by some local term. In the La Plata quadrangle it was called "grommets," while over at Creede the local term

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was "rubies," and in Telluride it was "mocha" and "java."

Highgrading was a crime punishable by fine and imprisonment if a man got caught. But in those days the chances of getting caught were not very great after a man got his grommets out of the locality and marketed. To get them away from the immediate vicinity of the mine was the most difficult problem. And that is where I came in.

Early one September morning in 1910, I was loading my pack string with salt at the switch, preparatory to setting off on my long trek back into the mountains. A fellow came over to talk to me. He was a big man, over six feet tall and proportionately broad. He was all bone and muscle. To a kid like me he looked like a giant. He said he was a miner from one of the nearby mines.

"You have a good string of pack jacks," he remarked.

"Yes, I do," I replied. "I have to, to get this stuff through to where I'm going."

"And where is that?" he asked.

When I told him it was on the Indian Ridge almost up to the old Rico tollroad, he got very interested. He asked me a lot of questions about the country. He inquired where the various trails turned off the Indian Ridge on the Dolores side toward the Rio Grande railroad, and then he asked me, "Kid, how would you like to make fifty dollars?"

"I'd like it fine," I replied. I had a hunch right then what the job was to be.

"Can you keep your mouth shut?" he asked.

"For fifty dollars I can be absolutely deaf, dumb, and blind," I answered.

"Good enough," he responded. "This is what I want you to do. I have a load of stuff down here that I want you to pack over to Rico for me. I'll go along with you. There will be about eight hundred pounds in the lot, so bring along enough jacks to pack that amount without loading any one of them very heavy. We may want to travel fast. Bring a saddle horse for me, and be here just about dark a week from tonight. I'll meet you somewhere along this road between here and the mouth of the canyon and show you where to go."

I came back with my pack string at the proper hour on the evening specified, and sure enough, my man, known as Long John, met me on the road some little distance above the switch. We turned off the road at this point and traveled about two hundred yards westward through the oak brush. Here we found another man standing guard over a pile of sacks of

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grommets. Long John explained to me that this man was his partner and that the sacks of ore were the stuff they wanted me to move.

"There are twelve sacks altogether," he said, "and they weigh about seventy pounds apiece, so now you know how to figure your loads. But be damn sure and tie them on securely, 'cause we do not want to lose any of them; and let us get busy and get out of here, pronto."

Both men were nervous and on the alert. The partner did nothing but stand over near the edge of the little clearing, with his rifle across his arm, peering into the twilight and listening for the sound of approaching feet. Long John tried to help me load the burros, but he knew nothing about packing and was more of a hindrance than a help. But it did not take me long to do the loading. In about twenty minutes we were ready to go. As we pulled out in the deepening twilight and headed north into the darkness of the La Plata canyon, I heard his partner say to Long John: "I'll meet you at the other end of the line."

Long John and I traveled all night with that burro string. We got out of the La Plata canyon and over the highest and most rugged part of the Indian Ridge. Daylight found us back down to timberline at the head of South Roaring Fork. We decided to camp there for the day to let our stock rest and to get some sleep ourselves. As we were unloading, Long John said to me, "Listen, kid. I ain't fooling you a bit, and I know it. You know that this stuff we are packing off here is highgrade ore, and you are right. It is the richest ore out of the richest mine in the La Platas. Me and my partner have been a long time in getting it together, and now we don't want to lose it. I want to hide these sacks for the short while we are camped here. Each one of them is worth better than two thousand dollars and I ain't a-kiddin' you." (And that was at the old price of gold. Add seventy-five percent for the current value.)

"That is easy," I replied. "Just throw each jack's saddle and blankets over his load as we unsaddle them, and when we get through there will be nothing in sight but the empty saddles."

I did not doubt Long John's estimation of value in the slightest degree. In fact, I thought it was rather modest, because I knew that ore had been taken out of both the May Day and the Idaho worth fifty dollars a pound. I deeply regretted that I did not have a major interest in that forty

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thousand dollars' batch of high-grade. I was sorry that I was not a highgrader.

Two mornings later we broke timber on the edge of Burnt Timber flats, where the trail from Monteloros switch on the Rio Grande Southern came out on top of the ridge and joined ours. There was Long John's partner waiting for us. He had come around on the train to that siding and had walked up the hill to intercept us. Long John was greatly surprised to see him. I had a hunch that all was not going as planned.

The two men held a rather earnest conference at a point too far away for me to hear what was said, but when it was over they approached me and Long John said:

"We won't take this stuff any farther now, kid. 'Taint safe. We want to hide it back here in the timber somewhere and wait until the excitement dies down. You stay here while me and my partner take the jacks back a little way and unload them."

How far back into that dense forest those two men went I do not know. They were gone about three hours. They cached the ore, however, because the burros were unloaded when they came back. Long John gave me a specimen of the ore for a keepsake along with the fifty dollars he paid me for packing the ore that far. I have that specimen yet. It was about the size of half a walnut and contained far more gold than it did quartz. An assayer told me later that the specimen itself was worth almost as much as the money Long John paid me.

Long John and his partner went their way down the hill to take the train back to their jobs. Before we parted they assured me that they would return at no distant date to move their treasure on to market, and made me promise to help them again at that time with my pack stock. I went on about my own business and was extremely occupied during the balance of the autumn. An early snow during the equinoctial storm in the high country made it necessary to move the sheep out of the mountains early that year.

I did not take the time to return to Burnt Timber flat immediately and try to locate the place of the cache, and I was not inclined to do so. I would not have known how to dispose of the ore if I had possessed it, and I certainly would have received no cooperation from my father or from my older brother. I would have gotten a good "jacking up" instead. So I did nothing about it.

I could have found the very spot where the ore was buried had I turned my attention to

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the search immediately, before the tracks of the burros and the men became obliterated by the storm. I could have tracked the pack jacks to the point where the men unloaded them, and I could have tracked the men to the place where they buried the ore. It might have been a painstaking task for a few hours, but I could have done it successfully. In the light of subsequent events I have deeply regretted that I did not do it.

I did not return to the mountains with the sheep the following summer. I heard indirectly that some big, broad-shouldered man had made inquiries for me at some of the camps, but that was all. I knew it was Long John, and I wondered how he finally succeeded in getting his ore packed out, and how much money he realized out of it. That he would not be able to find his cache never entered my mind.

It had all seemed so logical, so reasonable, and so natural to me that I did not think of any difficulty in connection with the ore except the rather minor one of transportation. The caching of highgrade ore, until a favorable time to carry it away, was a common practice, and I had never before known of a miner being unable to find his treasure. Imagine my surprise, and my regrets, when a few years later I found Long John in a Boulder, Colorado, sanitarium. He was in the last stages of miner's consumption. The following is his story:

"When my partner came to us on the flats that morning, he said we were under suspicion and that it was not safe to go on with our ore just then. We did not want to take the chances on going to the pen and of having our highgrade confiscated at the same time, so we determined to hide it out and lie low until the next summer.

"When we took those burros and went back into the forest, we did not follow the trail you and I came out by. We just headed back into the timber, winding our way through the fallen logs and around the boggy places.

"I guess we traveled between a quarter and a half of a mile before we found a place to our liking for our cache. The soil was soft and easy to work at this point, so we dug a long trench, about two feet deep, and put our sacks of grommets in the bottom of it and covered them up. We did a good job, too. We tramped all the dirt back into that trench on top of those sacks. Then we smoothed the place over and scattered some old leaf mold over it in such a way that it could not be distinguished from any of the rest of

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the surrounding ground.

"We did not want to leave any artificial marks around there so we did not cut any blazes on the tree near the cache, but we marked the place by natural objects in such a way we were sure we could go back to it. From it we could see the bluff on a hillside across the Dolores River. South of the cache about fifty yards was a tall dead tree with a peculiarly twisted branch at the top. To the westward was a little spring. A few feet southwest of the trench my partner stuck a small dead limb, branches pointing down, in the ground. He set it at an angle so it would look like it had fallen there naturally, but we were sure we would recognize it when we saw it again. About the same distance on the opposite side, I laid a piece of dead sapling, about seven feet long and five or six inches through, across the upturned roots of a dead log. I put it there in such a way that one end of the stick jutted out beyond the roots quite a bit more than the other. We would recognize that when we saw it again, too.

"Maybe we would have found the place if my partner had been along with me, but he got killed in a mining accident in Arizona the winter before. I went up there alone the next summer, but I could never find the place, nor the markings we had left. I got so confused I could hardly find my way back out of the timber. I tried to find you, but you were gone and the Mexican sheepherders could not tell me where you were. I finally had to give up the search and come away, and I have never been back since.

"Kid," continued the old man, "that fortune is still there. Right where me and my partner buried it. We never told another soul about it, and it is worth going after, and it is yours if you can find it. My partner is already gone and I soon will be, so it won't ever do us any good. It might pay you big to hunt for it, and I wish you the best of luck."

And with those remarks, Long John started me on a fascinating lost-treasure hunt that has extended intermittently through the years. I have not found the treasure yet, but always there is the furtive hope that on the next trip the powerful forces of nature may be kind enough to settle the covering soil over that trench enough to show a marked depression, or to wash one little corner of it away, leaving exposed the frayed and rotted fragment of a telltale canvas ore bag.

In all my searching I have had the satisfaction of knowing

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that I was hunting for a cache whose existence was not clouded in doubt, veiled in mystery, or complicated with legend. The story of it has never before been told, so as yet there has not sprung up about it the usual crop of legends. What happened to those markers is not difficult for a man familiar with mountain winters to understand. Violent winter storms are of frequent occurrence in this district, and snow accumulates to a depth of five to seven feet. The sapling that Long John laid across the old log became overbalanced with snow and fell off from the perch on which he had put it, and possibly, in the violence of the winter tempests that occur in that country, it had been thrown several feet from the log on which he put it; while the small branch which his partner had so carefully planted on an angle like it had fallen naturally became overbalanced with a burden of snow and had fallen flat on the ground to undergo some disintegration during the winter season and thus to be so altered in appearance by natural forces as to be unrecognizable in the spring. The tree with the peculiar top could undergo similar changes from the heavy snowfall or violent winds by having a limb broken off, or a peculiar knot removed by nature which would be sufficient to change its appearance. To any man familiar with the forces of nature in the mountain country, and cognizant of the fickle character of natural marking of this sort, such changes are not surprising or unusual. In fact, they are to be expected, but Long John and his partner, being unfamiliar with the out-of-doors conditions, were like many other neophytes and accepted as permanent their puny efforts in making futile markings that were so susceptible to alteration by the common forces of snow and wind. They wrote their marking upon the sands of circumstances and the elements erased their writings. The irresistible forces of nature so altered their artificial "open sesame" to their golden treasure that Long John could not discern the combination to the natural safe deposit box in which they deposited their rich treasure, nor have I, as yet, been able to interpret the changes that nature wrought; but I have not yet given up hope.

The unalterable existence of Burnt Timber flats, the cache of ore nearby, and the bluff on the mountainside across the Dolores River have successfully withstood the ravages of time and silently guard a fortune in gold in the stately forest on the famous ridge.

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BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Jerry Bauer

RUTH RENDELL

A good novel takes its readers into another world, and writers of mysteries frequently plunge their audience into places where, even if angels wouldn't fear to tread there, readers would rarely be found. Places like police precincts, morgues, dark alleys in dangerous neighborhoods. In her twelve Inspector Wexford novels, Ruth Rendell takes us into the homes and shops of Kingsmarkham—the rundown and the luxurious alike—wherever murder has been done. We find ourselves in London, where the crotchety Dr. Crocker has exiled Wexford for a rest, and even on the coastal highways of California. For a provincial, middle-aged detective chief inspector, Reginald Wexford—described as "the very prototype of an actor playing a top-brass policeman" —really gets around.

A great novel, however, goes beyond a good novel when it explores the more challenging geography of the mind and heart. You may already be a fan of Ruth Rendell's non-series novels, the most recent being *Master of the Moor*. Character is paramount in these novels of psychological suspense; the exploration of the twisted, tortured roads a human being can travel provides hair-raising,

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sometimes chilling, reading. It is always uncomfortable reading, and induces a sense of claustrophobia in me. It is as if a heavy fog, or a damp and musty blanket, is falling on me as I'm forced to look at myself in her sad characters—a funhouse reflection of a normal person, a scary distortion of sanity. These are not gothic novels; there's nary a false note in the portraits of her characters. That is what makes them so horrifying.

This column is devoted to introducing you to a series, though, and I'm happy to report that the Inspector Wexford novels are as good in their way as the psychological novels. The key is, not surprisingly, the characters that populate these more conventional police procedurals.

Rendell is a strong stylist. There is always attention given to the physical world her characters inhabit, and their reactions to their surroundings. She effortlessly describes the chaos of a scatterbrained sculptor's studio, the dinginess of an unprofitable tobacconist's shop, the dreariness of a house-proud, middle-class British home: "For the first time in six months dust had begun to settle on the dressing table, the iron mantelpiece and the linoed floor." And this ability to set a stage succinctly serves her well in her characters' portraits. In *No More Dying Then,* thirty-five-year-old Mike Burden, Wexford's right-hand man, has recently lost his wife to cancer. This pragmatic, private man is a powder keg of unexploded grief, and Wexford is concerned. To the genial if not over-bright Sergeant Camb—whose job is primarily that of receptionist at the station house—Mike Burden's new habit of swearing all the time is the biggest shock. To him, "It was like opening a nice book written by someone whose books you liked and asked the librarian to keep for you, opening it and reading a word that used to be printed with an *f* and a dash."

As for Reg Wexford himself, he's middle-aged, immensely tolerant and sympathetic, and widely read. He's the father of two grown daughters, the younger a beautiful actress. One watches her career develop over the course of the series, and is warmed by her continued closeness to her iconoclastic father. Wexford is unhappy in closed spaces (so of course he gets trapped in the newly-installed elevator in the precinct house), is gruffly impatient with those he most cares about (like his old friend Dr. Crocker, who is always doodling duodenums and other disgusting shapes),

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and mischievously needles Mike Burden by quoting snippets of poetry at odd moments. He has a reputation for doggedly pursuing his instincts in a case, and for fairness. Thus in *Wolf to the Slaughter* he readily accepts the defeated resignation of a young constable under his command, even though he regrets the occasion that offered him no other option. It is perhaps in *Murder Being Done Once* that Wexford, the man, plays the largest role. The theme of the novel is identity, and Wexford's is sorely tested when he finds himself in London, a guest in the home of his nephew, who's investigating a bizarre murder. Wexford's wife is suffocating him with concern over his health, the metropolis makes him feel like a provincial tourist, and while he's itching to discuss the murder with his nephew, the young inspector seems determined not to bring the subject up. But many of the novels have a theme of love, in all its myriad variations: obsessive love in *Wolf to the Slaughter,* unrequited love in *From Doon with Death,* incest in *A Guilty Thing Surprised,* the love between boyhood friends in *The Best Man to Die,* and the love of a parent for a child in *No More Dying Then.* These themes are usually developed in the main plot and then echoed in the subplots. In this way Wexford and his men grow in understanding as they see their own lives—and the daily anxieties in them—grown to murderous proportions in the lives of their neighbors.

Ruth Rendell was born in London in 1930, and since 1965 she has written more than twenty books. Many of the Wexford novels are available in Ballantine paperback editions.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Julie Smith has introduced a fresh and funny young heroine in **Death Turns a Trick** (Walker and Company, $11.95, 174 pp.). The narrator is Rebecca Schwartz, a San Francisco lawyer, daughter of a famous trial attorney. Among her clients is a feminist group of prostitutes—yes, you heard correctly—and because Rebecca likes their leader, she agrees to dress up and play the piano for a party in the bordello. The novel opens with a raid, and with Rebecca smuggling out a well-known congressman, smashing into a car, being held in jail, and returning to her apartment to find a battered body on her new rug. Rebecca and her family, her seemingly spacey partner, and the men who can be loosely labeled her "love life" add up to a lot of laughs and a pretty good mystery.

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Stephen Benatar has written a horrifyingly quiet novel in **Wish Her Safe at Home**, recently published by St. Martin's Press ($11.95, 217 pp.). It is a truly sinister portrait of a lonely, middle-aged London woman who one fine day inherits a two-hundred-year-old house in Bristol. Rachel Waring, her isolation from the glamor, wealth, and power of the modern world, her hopeless clerical job, her bullying roommate, her shyness in strange social situations—all of this, added to her girlish fantasies, make one desperately long, as she does, for a fresh start in her new home. But despite her change of venue, or perhaps because of it, the doors that Rachel opens are not the ones that lead to more friends, meaningful work, hope for a contented future. Instead Rachel lets her guard down and becomes overwhelmed—and finally overpowered—by the dark side of her personality. It's a Sleeping Beauty tale gone awry, as Rachel begins to rewrite her past, creating a future populated by a charismatic ghost.

Gabriel ("Gabe") Wager is "a tough little spic bastard" who works as a cop on the Denver police force. **The Avenging Angel** is the fifth novel in this series, written by Rex Burns (The Viking Press, $12.50, 222 pp.). The "angel" of the title refers to a crude drawing of a winged figure wielding a sword aloft, and it's turning up on corpses, first in Denver, then in a small Colorado town. Gabe's investigation at the site of the second murder reveals a possible meaning for the drawing: it is the symbol of the Danites, Mormon vigilante groups—historically, that is—that destroy members of opposing splinter sects. When Gabe's trail leads him to a houseful of massacred men, women, and children, the police must find the other Mormon family on the run before the Danites do. The novel climaxes in a scary scene as Gabe and friends hold the fort against the night marauders There's lots of violence, but the plot is fresh, and Gabe, his girlfriend, his partner, and others are credibly drawn.

Bantam Books has just reissued Margaret Erskine's **The Family at Tammerton**, first published in the 1960's ($2.25, 182 pp.). Scotland Yard's Detective Septimus Finch—"large and bland"—meets a young woman on the train from London who will become the catalyst for murder. Finch must untangle all the past history that binds the suspects, and do it quickly enough to prevent the inevitable second murder. This is solid, old-fashioned entertainment set in Somerset in the household of a wealthy family. It has all the conventional elements of the classics and a dash of fresh twists to liven things up.

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THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



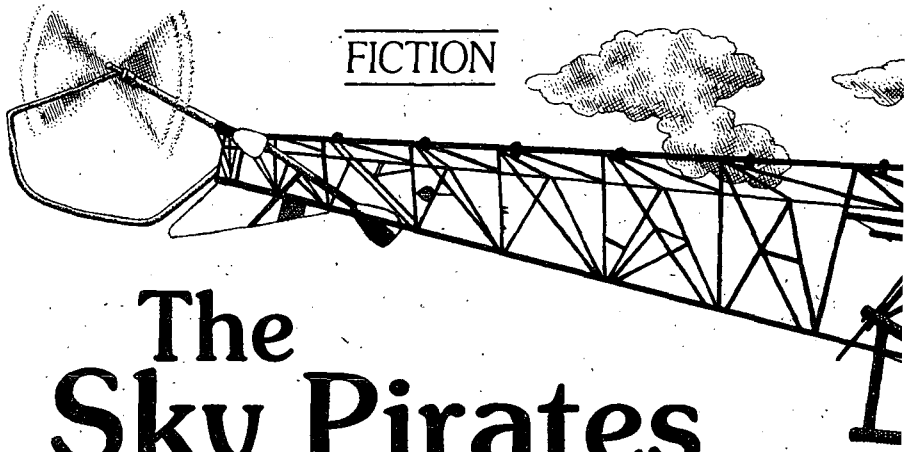
Photograph by Robert Frank. Copyright 1950 by Robert Frank. Reprinted by permission of the Zebra Corporation.

Why has the hearse come here, on this foggy day? We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Box 100, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

The winning entry for the November contest will be found on page 155.

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FICTION



The Sky Pirates

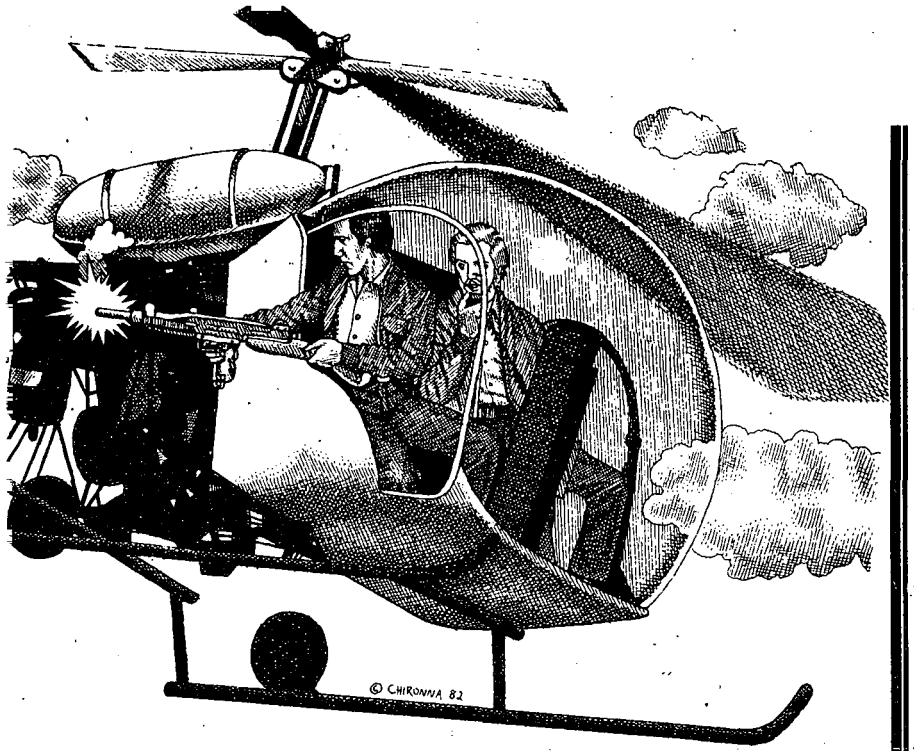
by Donald Jordan

In the afternoon of each weekday, the helicopter for the S&D Bank left its pad atop the Atlanta center and sprang into the air like an odd looking insect given a sudden burst of energy. Taking a southerly course, it proceeded to fly in a rough circle, dropping down upon the helipads on top of S&D's branch banks or subsidiaries. Hovering over each pad, it ingested several sacks of cash and paper transactions representing the bank's daily receipts. The helicopter was small, not much more than a bubble with props, and was fondly referred to as the Jolly Green Pea. On any given day its return to the home bank found its belly engorged with bags of money, checks, and bonds—and receipts which hitherto would have taken at least forty-eight hours to transfer were turned over within the day of the transactions.

The protection of the chopper in its speedy collection of funds and paper rested with S&D's security chief, Sidney Lornhorn Hammer. An ex-FBI agent, Hammer was a tough and meticulously careful security officer, with an eye for loopholes and vulnerable areas. He was a stocky man, not tall, with a thick torso and short-cropped, greying hair, stern and somewhat suspicious eyes, a no-nonsense air, and the movements of authority. He often chewed on the butt of an unlit cigar and from his left ear a small piece was

Illustration by Ron Chironna

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missing, the result of an engagement with drug smugglers when he had been with the FBI. Hammer was well liked by the officers of the bank, demanded and earned confidence, and under his authority the exposure of the bank to theft and fraud, beginning at the home office and continuing through each of its vast network of branches and subsidiaries, had been all but eliminated. A restless and untiring man, he spent his days refining the bank's security, and extending this protection to the branches throughout the state.

The Jolly Green Pea was a fast little chopper and skimmed over the countryside like a bee. To reach the several cities it visited in a day, it crossed a great deal of open and forested land, sometimes no more than a speck in the sky, sometimes skimming the treetops. Its efficiency had been honed to a science, and as it settled onto the top of a bank building, one, two or three officers emerged as though on signal, threw their sacks into the bubble, and sent the aircraft on its way in a matter of seconds. But for occasional sick leave or time off, the pilot was a young man named Griggs who flew with confidence and ability and enjoyed his job immensely. The helicopter service had become so integrated into its system of accounting that it was scarcely noticed. On any given day, the Jolly Green Pea flew around the state, dropped down onto banks' roofs

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like a praying mantis, stuffed its belly with currency, and returned to the Atlanta nest like a full and satisfied insect.

In a little clearing deep into a pulpwood forest, far from any farmhouse, highway, or road, two men sat in another helicopter. The first was a young man with serious grey eyes, a strong jutting Dick Tracy chin, a face perhaps too lean and angular to be considered handsome, loosely groomed light hair, and a cool and quiet voice which, though sometimes icy, usually held a note of humor. His name was William Dailey. The second was a little older, shorter, and heavier, with thick, powerful legs that appeared incapable of the agility with which they could negotiate a wall or an obstacle course, eyes equally serious but in a different way—eyes that had seen the worst in men and what could happen to men, eyes that could not be shocked. His name was Holmes Fitzpatrick. They sat quietly, hardly speaking. In the copter were two radios, and, to be as certain as possible, each was monitoring a separate frequency. The hands and fingers of both men were sheathed in thin surgical gloves.

Bill Dailey glanced at his watch. "It's about time."

Without responding, Fitzpatrick gave him a look that asked silently: how could they know this would be the route chosen today?

"His navigation varies," Dailey said. "But I've watched Griggs too long. Today he'll be right on us." He'd hardly spoken when they heard the Jolly Green Pea contact the Atlanta tower. Dailey tightened his gloves and started the rotors. "Ready?"

"Yes, sir," Fitzpatrick said.

The chopper rose, attained visible altitude, and hovered just above the treetops. In minutes they saw the Pea; it was at about three o'clock, exactly as Dailey had calculated. Dailey swung around, flew low, then rose and shadowed the S&D copter for a few miles. At precisely three forty-five he looked at Fitzpatrick.

"I'm ready, captain," Fitzpatrick said. From beneath his legs he drew an automatic rifle. He inserted a clip, and braced himself into the door. Dailey increased speed, gained altitude, and flew in close and slightly above the Pea. The pilot, surprised, gave them a hard look, then with a flash of perception called the tower. "This is SD one-five-niner-two-seven. I got a chopper on me . . . "

Dailey broke into this transmission with authority. "SD one-five-niner-two-seven, change to frequency two thirty-seven."

There was a moment's hesitation, then-on this new frequency Griggs said tersely, "All right, what do you want?"

Dailey jockeyed into a position which made Fitzpatrick, sitting

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in the door with the automatic, clearly visible. "Remain on this frequency," he ordered. "Do not contact the tower. Now, Mr. Griggs, in approximately one minute I want you to get that chopper down."

There was another second's delay, then Griggs' voice from the Pea blurted, "You're crazy! What the hell do you—"

Fitzpatrick leaned forward. He lifted the automatic rifle so that Griggs could easily see what he intended to do. Fitzpatrick fired three rounds in front of the Pea. The pilot saw the recoil and he could hear the rat-tat-tat of the report. The second radio, sitting between Fitzpatrick's legs, was tuned in to the Atlanta tower. On this radio they heard Griggs' urgent call, "Mayday! Mayday! This is SD one-five-niner-two-seven. I'm being hijacked—"

Fitzpatrick, an expert marksman, steadied himself and fired one round at the Pea. It entered one side of the bubble and passed cleanly through the other. The pilot's recoil was easily visible; the Pea took a dip, then went into a series of evasive actions. Dailey, the better pilot, stayed with him, perhaps fifty feet away. Fitzpatrick, his legs braced against the sides of the cockpit, took the shock without lowering the rifle. The little chopper leveled off and Dailey said coolly, "Return to frequency two thirty-seven."

The unnatural, mechanical movements of the young pilot were evident, his anger at being cornered almost palpable. Then on the radio he said tersely, "All right, you got me. What do you want?"

"I want you to put that chopper down," said Dailey. "I do not wish to shoot you down but I will if necessary. Turn right ten degrees. In one minute you'll see an open field."

The chopper responded. In seconds the field appeared and the Jolly Green Pea settled upon it as neatly as a bird alighting. Dailey followed closely.

"Cut your engine," Dailey ordered. "Get out of the chopper."

Griggs did not respond. Dailey tapped Fitzpatrick on the shoulder and the latter lowered the rifle and placed it between his knees.

"Mr. Griggs," said Dailey, "get out of the chopper. You will not be harmed. Walk away. Don't look back."

"Listen," Griggs said. "You'll never get away—"

"You have ten seconds," said Dailey.

Griggs swore and climbed out of the Pea. He gave them one quick furtive look, then turned and began to walk. He walked slowly at first, glancing over his shoulder, then suddenly he began to run, darting, as though to evade the bullets he expected. He ran until he reached the woods.

"All right," said Dailey.

Fitzpatrick put down the rifle and walked to the Pea. He removed

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the bank bags and loaded them into their copter. He then decommissioned the Pea's radio and tore out the ignition. To Dailey he said, "I'll cut the fuel line, just to be safe."

"Make sure he can see it," Dailey said. "I'd hate for him to take off without fuel."

Fitzpatrick cut the line, then climbed back in. As they rose they saw Griggs running back to the Pea, looking up at their rising chopper. Turning south, they flew until they were beyond Griggs' hearing, then they turned east and north. Within minutes Dailey brought the chopper down again, this time in an open area not far from a secondary road. They got out and removed the sacks from the chopper. Two cars sat in the shade of an oak grove.

"You're sure you don't want to take the bags?" Fitzpatrick said.

"No. Just the cash."

Methodically, they cleared one sack, then placed in it the currency extracted from all the others. The remaining documents were left undisturbed. "How much do you think?" said Fitzpatrick.

"I don't know," Dailey replied. "But whatever—here." He counted out roughly one hundred thousand dollars from packages of large bills. Fitzpatrick put this in a suitcase retrieved from his car.

"Put everything back into the chopper," Dailey said.

They stacked the bags neatly in the aircraft. Fitzpatrick hesitated, as though reluctant to abort a mission. "You're sure about the chopper?"

"Yes," Dailey said. "Leave it. They'll find it easily. It can be flown out of here. The key is in the ignition."

He took his sack and threw it into the trunk of his car. They looked at one another, then shook hands. "Good luck, captain."

"Good luck to you, Holmes. You know the rules."

"I know them. If I never see you again . . ."

"I know." Fitzpatrick gave a little salute, got into his car, and drove off. Dailey waited five minutes, then started his car.

Behind them they left a rented helicopter, fully operational and unscathed; bank bags with all receipts and records intact and, but for the missing currency, apparently untouched; the tracks of two rented cars and oversized boots; and no more prints than are made by surgical gloves. With them they took just under two million dollars in unmarked bills.

Except for a young helicopter pilot who had no transportation and no radio and who would have to walk two or three hours to find help, an aviation rental service who had to bring in a pilot to fly their chopper out, and several sacks of bank

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transactions temporarily diverted, William Dailey's sky piracy of S&D's Jolly Green Pea had been accomplished with little inconvenience to anyone. Ex-combat veteran Holmes Fitzpatrick had, as a good tactical man will, questioned the validity of this maneuver but had accepted it totally when he agreed to his part in the mission. Ex-military pilot William Dailey had always been inordinately considerate, had always taken risks for the protection of others, but had never been known to fail. Fitzpatrick trusted him completely, would follow the strategy they'd agreed on for the dissemination of his part of the money, and would die protecting the secret.

Dailey drove north, parked the rented car in a ten acre parking lot where his own car was waiting, left the keys under the floor mat, and continued driving until he reached a motel where he had reservations. Both the car and the copter had been rented with documents he'd spent a year compiling—ersatz policies, a false address, counterfeit licenses, several previous legitimate rentals, and a beard, a wig, and a slight accent that distanced the fictitious Lawrence Price from himself, William Dailey. The year of research and planning had required the patience, intelligence, and resolve of a man dedicated to triumphing over an unseen enemy.

In his Holiday Inn room, Dailey arranged the money in stacks of one hundred thousand dollars each, which he placed in legal sized envelopes brought along for this purpose. He slept, but in the morning he did not return home. He embarked on a week-long automobile tour through four states and nearly twenty cities. The ingenuity with which he conducted this phase of his plans was not derived from experience. Dailey's record was clean. He knew, however, that sudden and unlimited cash had been the undoing of many a well-planned operation, and for the dissemination of the S&D money he had constructed a background over a long and painstaking period. In cities in Florida, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Georgia he'd visited banks and made himself known to one or more of the officers. He told the bankers that he and his wife were thinking of retiring nearby, since his wife's people were from the area. This might be several years off, but in the meantime he wanted to establish credible banking contacts. He was expecting to come into some money, and perhaps he would be making a deposit in the bank. Of course at each bank he received a warm reception. On one or two subsequent visits he repeated the casual but carefully schemed contact.

Now, perhaps a year later, as Dailey drove through the four states, returning to some twenty or so banks, he said to each of the

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bankers in turn, "My uncle died recently and I've come into the inheritance I mentioned to you. I'd like to buy a savings certificate." He then handed over the envelope containing a hundred thousand in cash. The bank officers expressed surprise and not a little consternation that he carried cash. "Well, it's kind of a joke," Dailey said. "That was so much money that when the will was probated, my wife and I asked for cash, just so we could look at it for a day or two. I know that's foolish but we really got a kick out of touching all that money, you know. Actually, it wasn't quite a hundred thousand but I put a little with it to make a nice round number."

The bankers were eager to get the deposit, and raised no fuss when Dailey asked if the interest could be mailed to him at his present address.

Within a week, Dailey had deposited something under two million dollars in savings certificates in nearly twenty cities, with arrangements for interest to be mailed to him monthly. His annual projected income was approximately a quarter of a million dollars.

During his travels, Dailey read several reports about the skyjacking, described as a "daring daylight robbery" or "the space-age pirate's raid" but there was nothing in the papers to indicate that the police expected to break the case.

When he returned home he was tired, but his wife Gloria and his daughters Norma and Ellie greeted him with love and affection. "Daddy! When are we going to move?"

"Soon," he told them. "We're going to get a new start and some new friends."

Dailey had prepared his family to move to a new town as soon as his "inheritance" came through. Beginning a new life with a lot of money would not arouse the suspicion of old friends exposed to their sudden wealth. "Bill's expecting to receive an inheritance," Gloria had told her neighbors, "and when he does, he wants us to move to a place where he thinks he can take advantage of it."

For Gloria's benefit Dailey had arranged several telegrams through the year reporting his Uncle William's illness and, finally, months ago, the telegram announcing William's death. His week-long trip was ostensibly to assist in the final probation of his uncle's estate and the collection of his own patrimony. On the phone he'd told Gloria, "We'll get some cash but most of what I receive will be in securities. We'll get a nice monthly income, though."

So proficient had Dailey been in preparing his wife for these events that the final news of their wealth was no shock to her.

After he'd given the girls some presents and seen them off to

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bed, Dailey called his wife into their bedroom. "I want to show you something."

"What?" Gloria was excited. She was like a little girl, bright-eyed and flushed.

He took her into his arms. "We've got some money now. For the first time in our lives—we're rich!"

"Bill—oh, Bill, rich! We can't be rich!"

"I thought of getting you a little something special," he said. "Then I decided what the heck, we may as well treat ourselves to one big splurge. Here." He dumped the contents of his last envelope on the bed. She gave a cry. With noises of excitement, somewhere between laughter and crying, Gloria handled the money, felt it, smelled it, spread it out on the covers.

Then she jumped up and smothered him with kisses. "Oh Bill! I wish I had known your uncle!"

Sidney Lornhorn Hammer received his first call from pilot Griggs some three hours after the Jolly Green Pea had been forced to land in the little clearing deep into the Georgia woodlands. Griggs called from a farmhouse that he'd reached after a hike of several miles over rough terrain. Hammer said, "I'll be damned." He obtained the location of the Pea and notified the authorities. By the time he informed the president of the bank, conferred with the federal agents, awaited the bank's decision on procedure, and decided to drive down and pick up Griggs himself, it was dark. Not until the following morning was the Pea located by air, when another chopper was used to fly in repair parts, along with Hammer, FBI agents, and Griggs. All the necessary ground investigations were made but in the heavily weeded field there was virtually no evidence that a second helicopter had ever been near the area. Griggs flew the S&D copter out. The sky was a clear cloudless blue and the forest as picturesque as a postcard.

During the drive back to Atlanta, Hammer had interrogated Griggs and received an account of what had happened; his swift and shrewd mind, however, had already formed a pretty accurate conception before he heard the pilot's report. The sky pirates had evidently monitored the Pea's activity so long and thoroughly that a pattern had been surmised. The criminal chopper had obviously been piloted by an expert, which narrowed the range of suspects—considering the training facilities within a three hundred mile radius and the last decade's buildup of helicopter pilots—to several thousand.

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In the next few days the investigations of federal agents, agents for the insurance companies, and Hammer tracked one another, but even after the authorities decided that there were no holes in the execution of the robbery and that only a long process of elimination might produce a lead, Hammer dogmatically pursued the case. It was his bank, his baby—almost his money. His professional competence had been attacked, and a fierce competitive instinct was aroused.

Hammer climbed into the Pea and had Griggs fly the route he'd taken on the day of the robbery. He hated flying, suspected that his bridges were going to be shaken loose, felt as exposed in the little bubble as a man taking a shower in public, and had to steel himself against the low altitude, the somewhat woozy sensation of treetops whizzing past fifty feet beneath like an exaggerated early movie clip of a comic car chase. From the S&D helipad they took off at precisely the same time Griggs had on the day of the robbery.

"I want you to fly as closely as possible over the route you took and do it in approximately the same time frame. Touch down on every bank."

Hammer kept his eyes on the ground, noting anything that might be of value, monitoring the time and questioning Griggs to help him recall anything extraordinary.

"You're always on the frequencies with the control towers, right? Do you remember any kind of transmission with another helicopter?"

"No, but these people would never have contacted the controllers and they wouldn't have had to reach an altitude that would put them on radar."

"That means that wherever they came from, somebody might have noticed them."

"I doubt it," said Griggs. "There's a lot of military chopper activity in this area. Chances are, nobody gave it a second thought."

"Let's say he flew the thing in, maybe from another state. Would he have had to fuel up?"

"That depends. Maybe not. I don't think he was on me very long." Doubtless feeling his own sense of responsibility and outrage, the young pilot set his jaw. "Maybe he was sitting quietly somewhere," Griggs said. "He heard my transmission or got a visual reading on me. Then he lifted off." Griggs' tone assumed a professional respect. "He could cowboy that chopper, I'll say that for him. It was like he anticipated every move I made."

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Hammer made a note of that. Perhaps the skyjacker was a stunt helicopter showman; an aerial trapeze artist.

"About here's where he first intercepted me," Griggs said. "I doubt that he'd been shadowing me very long, but I can't be sure." They turned right and flew to the field where the Pea had been forced to land. "Want to sit her down?"

"No, we've trampled those weeds to death," said Hammer. "All right, they flew south, probably for your benefit. Then turned and went—where?"

"Probably not too far without refueling."

They returned to home base to refuel their own machine, but were in the air again when they learned, almost simultaneously, that a rented helicopter was missing, and that a farmer had discovered one. The chopper was located by air no more than ten miles northeast of the clearing where the Pea had been relieved of its cargo. This was forty-eight hours after the robbery, during which time Hammer realized the thieves could easily have reached Europe or Central America. He joined the feds in their site investigation, which proved about as frustrating as the previous one. Obviously the helicopter had been abandoned for cars; tracks were found, more or less obscured by the farmer's tractor tires. In the aircraft were all but one of the bank's bags, the contents, but for the currency, unmolested. The copter was in good flying condition. Hammer noted the neatness, the thoughtfulness with which the criminals had left all they couldn't use, and was struck with the sense of a personality who didn't wish to displease or harm—a personality almost apologetic in its criminality.

The aviation rental service brought in fuel and a man to fly the abandoned helicopter home. Hammer drove over and talked with the owners—Benning Aviation, Inc., a small partnership air service which owned only the one helicopter.

"Sure, this guy's rented our aircraft three, four times," Benning said. "No problems at all, paid in cash as I recall."

"Show me your documents," said Hammer.

"They're all here, believe me. We don't rent to anybody who's unqualified."

All the necessary records were in order. Benning described a man with a beard and blond hair who, though Hammer didn't know it, was totally unlike William Dailey. Though the authorities had gathered copies of the document as well as handwriting samples, Hammer asked for a few of his own. Already he knew that the previous helicopter rentals were contrived simply to lay the

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groundwork for the robbery.

As Hammer left, Benning added, "He had an accent, that I can tell you. Maybe European. Or Oriental."

"I'll bet he did," said Hammer.

A day later, a missing Hertz was found by the local police. It had been rented at the busy Atlanta airport with similar documents. The tank was half full and the key easily located.

To his wife, Mary, Hammer said, "These guys should have blown up the helicopter, destroyed the bank bags. Instead they went out of their way to be neat." He pulled on the ear lobe missing one small piece. "It doesn't fit the mode. What does that tell me?"

"I don't know, dear."

"Neither do I—yet."

He retreated to his overstuffed chair where he could chew on his cigar and brood in privacy. It seemed the skyjackers, infallible in their strategy, neat in their execution, had relieved the bank of a great sum of money and disappeared, as it were, into thin air.

Norma and Ellie Dailey squealed. They ran in circles and jumped up and down. "It's finished! It's finished!"

Gloria Dailey clapped her hands. "That's the most beautiful doll house I've ever seen."

Bill Dailey smiled faintly, pleased. "I've always wanted to do things like this," he said.

"It's having the time to put your mind on it," said Gloria. "And that handsome shop you've set up. Are you going to make the miniature furniture?"

"I think you should buy the furniture. Good stuff, though," Bill said. "Nothing cheap. Remember, this could be an heirloom."

Beyond their windows the picturesque Tuscon mountains were etched against a sky brilliantly blue. The fully equipped shop was one Bill had ordered when he purchased the house. Gloria was right; having the time to devote himself to handcrafts made a difference. For one thing, it established the impression of a man of leisure. Dailey had hardly done anything more than work in his new shop, prepare his wife and daughters for a lifestyle of relative wealth, and wait.

Dailey left his family and walked outside. He himself was not utterly acclimated to luxury and the indulgence of it left him with a faint sense of guilt. Though he loved flying, since moving into their new house he had not flown; nor would their slowly developing circle of new friends know he had been a pilot. For his aircraft he

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had substituted something he'd always thought he would like, a sleek and expensive car. In his garage sat a white and blue Mercedes. It was part of their one-time "splurge."

Prior to robbing the S&D bank, Dailey had committed no crimes. He had been a good student and had graduated from college. He'd served his country. He had been a dedicated family man. After finishing his tour of duty he'd found that, like so many others, he could not get a job as a pilot, and had tried to make it in some of the technological fields in which he had some expertise. Times were hard, jobs were scarce, and even when he had tried moonlighting as a computer operator there was hardly enough money to guarantee his family the things they needed.

To his wife, Dailey had often said, "What happened to the dream? I must have been some kind of moonstruck college kid."

"Things will work out," Gloria said. "We have each other." Her faith in him was compelling.

"It seems all I do is work," Dailey said. "If I'm not working I'm looking for ways to get ahead. I hate it. And if I hate it, how are you and the kids ever going to be happy?"

Dailey considered himself a victim of circumstances. He evidently could not do what he had expected to be able to do with his life. Dedication to patriotism, morality, and uprightness had been a disaster. He saw corruption in government, criminal infiltration into law enforcement, men in high places succeeding in shady deals for a quick buck, the triumph of criminality and crime, which seemed to receive protection from a mantle of respectability. He saw his family deprived while those who had contributed nothing fed on the vulnerability of others. And he was outraged.

Dailey actually had an Uncle William who was very much alive. Dailey's parents had died in an accident when he was a child and his father's brother Bill had taken him. Uncle William had administered the estate, providing for Dailey's needs and his education. The bulk of the money, however, he had invested in long term bonds which would not mature until Dailey was in his forties. It was foolish to so restrict the estate during a period of life when Dailey would need it most, and when Daily had found out about it, at about age twenty-three, he and his uncle had had harsh words. He moved out, joined the service, and ceased to have contact with his uncle except concerning matters of the estate. Now that he was independently wealthy, he saw no point in advising Uncle William of his whereabouts; when it was occasionally necessary for them to discuss business he handled this on the phone. It would

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be impossible to permit Gloria to know, ever, that he had any family.

Dailey took a look at his Mercedes, wiping a spot with his handkerchief. Then he walked back into the house to share the happiness of his family. As he reached the door a small plane flew overhead, and a twinge of apprehension and regret swept through him. He forced this aside by reminding himself that he was a man of wealth, that he had used his mind to establish his family for life without seriously injuring anyone, and that he had gotten away with it.

Sidney Hammer was not intimidated by the meeting that had been called by S&D's president but he knew that in the final analysis it was his scalp that would be shaved. The butt of the cigar jammed between his teeth was no less than a week old and had acquired something of the aroma of a rotted swamp log. Though no flame burned at its tip, the sign on the conference room door that said "Thank You For Not Smoking" would not have compelled him to extinguish the flame had he chosen to smoke.

The bank's president was a man named Gliglow, a *wunderkind* of the banking industry with an aggressive format, an impressive history, and an almost uncanny grasp of the legal and physical aspects of running a bank. Local law enforcement officials, agents for the FBI, insurance investigators, and most of the bank's security force—Hammer's people—attended the meeting, along with selected bank officers indoctrinated in the necessity for secrecy. Though Gliglow's questions were probing and enlightened, the result of the two hour meeting was a report which Hammer could have provided him with in five minutes: the well-executed robbery left them with no early leads; none of the money had surfaced, and the freely flowing arteries of police information had received no injection of covert information.

As expected, Gliglow, who above all else was a man of responsibility, addressed himself to the weaknesses of the bank. "We evidently opened ourselves to exposure," he said. "How do you think this happened, Sidney?"

Out of respect, Hammer removed the cigar butt before answering. "At all the points of ground contact the helicopter was secured. We have a contingency plan in case of motor failure or forced landing. An in-air commandeering wasn't programmed."

"Not programmed, but it happened," said Gliglow. "Evidently we have some gaps in our security."

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"Yes, sir."

"What've we done to correct this?"

"The weakness appears to have been in navigation procedures. We've briefed our pilots on the uses of a highly varied circuit."

"You're convinced this couldn't happen again?"

"No, sir," Hammer said. "I wouldn't say it couldn't. There's no absolute security against people who have the ingenuity and the resources. Not even for Brink's."

Gliglow knew, of course, what any street cop could tell him: that beyond a certain point there was nothing you could do to prevent robbery by someone determined enough and bold enough.

"Getting hit is one thing," Gliglow said. "Making no arrest is another. I'd hate to discontinue the helicopter service."

"We won't," Hammer said. "We'll find them."

The president gave him a chilly look. "I hope it's before all the money's gone."

Over and over, Hammer reviewed his sketchy evidence. The driver's and pilot's registrations used in the renting of cars and chopper were issued to a state resident, obviously an alias. Did this mean the impostor lived out of the state? Not necessarily. He might live around the corner from the temporary address used. Instead of the time-consuming process of obtaining false registrations, why hadn't the pirate simply used forged documents? Perhaps because he hadn't had a source of forged papers; perhaps because he wished to involve no one else in his scheme, or simply because he chose to keep things orderly and neat.

Hammer sent the driver's license number to the motor vehicle unit and received in return a picture of Lawrence Price, whose beard and blond hair matched the description offered by the personnel at Benning Aviation. He didn't think there was a prayer, but he took the picture out to the address that Price had used, an apartment complex called the Village Green on Piedmont. It was a somewhat seedy, low rent project, a quadrangle of two story brick buildings with exterior steel stairs, flaked and unpainted cornices, and concrete walks so cracked by roots and weather that every step was a danger. He found the resident manager in E-5, an athletic, vivacious little woman wearing jeans and stripping down an antique china cabinet which stood on newspapers on her patio. He showed her the picture.

"I guess you don't remember this tenant. He used to live in—let's see—A-7."

From a chain attached to her collar dangled a pair of glasses and

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she put these on. "You know, I do remember him. And you know why? I think he was the neatest single man we've ever had here."

"What do you mean neat? Personality?"

"No, I mean *neat*. His apartment." She lowered her voice. "Not very many of the people we get here care much about how the place looks, you know? It's low rent, comparatively. You go into any one of these apartments and—well, a mess. That's why the man who owns them never does any painting or repair that isn't necessary. This Mr.—what was his name?"

"Price?" asked Hammer.

"Price. That's it. Mr. Price moved in and right away fixed his apartment up. I mean, he straightened drapery rods, put screws in the door hinges, mended the furniture—he didn't have any of his own furniture—that sort of thing. Neat."

"How long's he been gone?"

"Oh, several months. He signed a year's lease but left before his time was up. That's pretty unusual, too."

"Did you get to know him, talk to him?"

"We hardly spoke at all," she said. "He had a funny little accent. The only thing I can remember is when I asked him what sort of business he was in he told me he was a geologist. He flew planes or something with all this exploration equipment. I couldn't imagine what they thought they'd find in this part of the world, but you know, he looked exactly like a geologist!"

Hammer thought about this a minute. The best lie was a half truth. Price evidently was not worried about letting it be known he was a pilot. Why should he be? It was the purpose for his establishing a false residence.

"Maybe I could see Mr. Price's apartment," he said.

She returned the picture, removed her glasses, and said, "Someone else lives there now. Why do you want to?"

Hammer gave her a brief glimpse of his I.D.—just enough to let her know he carried a badge. "Mr. Price seems to have disappeared. It could be he left something behind that would give us some lead as to his whereabouts."

"Not a chance," she said. "He hardly even had any clothes. All right, I'll let you see it. The tenants are at work. I'll have to go in with you."

She accompanied him to A-7. It now was occupied by a couple with two small children. Not very tidy. Of course all evidence of the previous tenant had been eradicated. The chance of undisturbed prints was nil. As they left, the manager said again, "Mr. Price

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simply didn't talk much. Any time he wanted anything he'd leave me a note. Like when he'd be back for his mail."

"Notes, huh?" said Hammer. "Not a chance you'd have kept any of these?"

She gave him a bright, efficient look. "Before I retired and took this job I was a secretary for a man who was always writing me notes on anything he could find—envelopes, pieces of magazine covers. I'd always follow the instructions, then file the notes. You'd be surprised how many times I had to prove to him I'd done what he told me. Yes," she said, "I probably have Mr. Price's notes in my correspondence file."

Hammer grinned. "How sweet you are. Dig them out for me, will you?" He gave her his address. "Drop them in the mail, huh?"

A day or two later he received a couple of notes that Price had written the apartment manager. They were in the same neat printing used on the rental forms—hardly identifiable—though the signature *Lawrence Price* was freer and perhaps that of a man not expecting scrutiny. Hammer sent copies to the lab on the hopes that a handwriting analysis might provide him a hint. The result was negative.

He took another drive out to the Village Green for a second look around and to ask the energetic manager, "Do you remember ever noticing the car Price drove. Make, model? County?"

"Gosh no," she said. "I couldn't tell you right now what any tenant drives or even if they have a car. I remember one other thing, though. The day he fixed my cabinet, I asked Mr. Price about his family. The only thing he said was that they lived in another state and in a few months he was going to join them."

"He fixed a cabinet in his apartment?"

"No, in my laundry room. Out by the pool. We have a cabinet where I keep my supplies. One of the doors had warped so badly it had twisted the hinge, you know? Every time I locked it, I had to lift up one side. I think Mr. Price just looked at that lopsided door until he was sick of it."

"Let me take a look, will you?"

She led him to the laundry room and the cabinet. It was inside, not exposed to weather. He could see that the door had been removed, trimmed and new hinge holes aligned.

"He borrowed my tools and fixed it in a jiffy."

"You've done no painting since then?" said Hammer. "Cleaning?"

"All I do out here is sweep up the chewing gum and cigarette wrappers."

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"How about letting me borrow your door for a couple of days? I'll need a screwdriver."

She gave him a look. "I guess I could take my supplies inside. Not that there's anything worth stealing. You will bring my door back."

"For sure," he said.

Using her screwdriver Hammer carefully backed out the screws and removed the cabinet door. He took this in to the lab. Chances were good that no one else had touched the hinge side of the door and that, out of the weather, the slick plywood held a removable print.

It was a hunch—and the first stroke of luck—a hunch that paid off. The lab picked up a couple of clean prints. The data went out and Hammer waited. Within twenty-four hours he had his answer. Nobody could identify the fingerprints. Alias Mr. Price had no record.

The preparations and subsequent movements of Holmes Fitzpatrick were not, by necessity, as dramatic as those of Dailey. Holmes would have done almost anything Dailey requested of him. The captain had once saved his life when Fitzpatrick's gunship went down and Dailey literally darted in through the trees to pluck Holmes and his buddies out of the jaws of the enemy. After that Holmes insisted on, and was granted, assignment with Dailey's crew.

Holmes' part in the robbery was simple enough. Other than a short briefing he knew nothing of the details. On a specified day he was picked up, told his assignment, jockeyed into position to fire on the Jolly Green Pea, and returned safely to his car. Not bad for a hundred thousand grand.

Holmes was a single man and had no family to whom to explain anything. He elected not to dispose of his money but to secrete it discreetly in his home. Just as discreetly, he used small amounts of currency at will. He was an expert marksman and followed the shooting circuits. At gun and skeet clubs he won many a bet, which would explain extra funds if the question ever arose. The worst that could happen was an investigation of unreported income by the IRS.

Fitzpatrick had no desire to be caught and imprisoned for robbery; but he had seen worse things—much worse. He had an attitude of inevitability, perhaps fatalism, that endowed him with a certain freedom. He did what he wished when he wished it. He

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gambled for high stakes on his marksmanship, and when he lost, he paid off with fairly large sums of cash. He did not worry about implicating Captain Dailey, for no matter what happened to him, he would never reveal the identity of his collaborator.

Hammer knew that a man who could fire a missile through a moving aircraft, doing harm to neither pilot nor machine, would have to be an expert marksman. He might be military or ex-military. He might be civilian, a sportsman and gun enthusiast, a top-notch rifleman. He might even be a police sharpshooter. Pilot Griggs, in fleeing to the cover of the trees, had had a distant glimpse of but one of the two robbers, and he appeared to be a man of average height and build, mid-thirties, who worked swiftly and confidently around choppers with spinning rotors. This perhaps implied familiarity with the aircraft, or ignorance of its dangers. All possibilities were fed into police profile computers with negative results. There were hundreds of skeet and gun clubs, branches of the riflemen's associations and shooting ranges, and the process of elimination, with limited police forces, could take forever.

Hammer racked his brain for a shortcut. The lack of a discoverable police record implied that these two men had come together to execute an isolated crime. What had brought them together? What did they have in common? One was a skilled pilot, the other an expert marksman. Where would two such proficient craftsmen merge? The only answer Hammer could think of was the military—helicopter gunships perhaps. Both military helicopter training and marksmanship were taught within two hundred miles of Atlanta.

With cooperation from the military and throwing all available personnel behind the effort, Hammer began to explore the records with emphasis on army sniper training. He received the dossiers on dozens, hundreds of men. The range of personalities he uncovered was varied: the street kid from Chicago, the Mexican-American who had been known to sit for three days on a trail waiting for a shot at the enemy. Griggs was shown as many photographs as possible. When current servicemen were exhausted, Hammer started working back for ten years.

The seemingly pointless task took an upswing when he talked to a colonel who headed up sniper training at Fort Benning. Not crazy about the direction of Hammer's pursuit, Colonel Slyke scoffed.

"You won't find any helicopter gunners in my outfit. That

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kind of weaponry resembles what we do like an elephant resembles a cobra."

"I may be dead wrong," said Hammer, "but somehow I keep getting flying and shooting together."

The next time he approached Slyke, the colonel was less adamant. "I happened to mention this to one of my officers. He remembered a man who came to us from a chopper assault outfit. Made a damn top sharpshooter."

"Who was he?"

"My officer couldn't recall the name. We'll find it. Can tell you this, though. The man hasn't been in the service for years."

"Okay. Who knows? It's all we've got," said Hammer. "Find it for me, will you?"

A few days later the colonel gave Hammer a name.

Moving at a fast pace, William Dailey took a mountain curve and felt the power, the performance, of his sleek Mercedes. He found a straight decline and gave it thrust, sliding into the inside as the blacktop canted into a reverse curve. He waited for a couple of vehicles to pass, then made a crossover, braked, and jerked to a halt. He stepped out of the car, walked to the rail, and looked out over the stark Arizona countryside. The colors, with a purity of light, appeared cleaner, more intense: blues, burnt siennas, crimsons. The vista was as close as he'd come to an airborne perspective since his pursuit of the Jolly Green Pea. He took a deep breath, filling his lungs, letting it out slowly.

Dailey felt restless. The transition to leisure from a hectic effort to work and earn money didn't come with ease. It wasn't that he was bored; more, it was that his talent, his ingenuity, weren't taxed. But for flying, he could think of no job he desired, and, for the moment at least, he could not consider opening his own flying operation. Conforming to his plan, he could do nothing that would require an extensive outlay of cash.

He rested his foot on the rail and was shocked, suddenly, by a thought that struck him. The thought was that he could commit another robbery. The action, the risk, the danger stirred his pulses, and he was surprised at himself. Maybe crime was addictive. He forced the thought aside as a passing idiocy. He refused to believe that his perfect success had placed him in a trap.

Dailey got into his car and drove home. The important thing to remember was that his wife and children were taken care of. He must do nothing to jeopardize that. He had made his will and

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attached to it, locked in his safe deposit box, was a list of his securities. Even if he died, even if he were imprisoned, his family would be okay.

His arrival at home was greeted with no outcry of excitement. Gloria was sitting on the patio, drinking a cocktail and wondering what to prepare for dinner. Her cupboards were so replete that making a decision required effort—gone were the days of hamburger helper and ground steak. The girls were fussing over their homework or the doll house, he wasn't sure which. He took a seat on the patio and Gloria made him a drink.

"You know, I was just thinking," she said. "Next week's my birthday. And I can't think of a thing I want."

"What a horrible fate."

"It just means that my beautiful husband has given us everything. It's nice, really. But I can never remember having a birthday when I didn't want a million things."

Mention of her birthday reminded Dailey of his restlessness, then of the fact that the annual interest on his bonds was nearly due. He'd have to call his Uncle William. The small annuity from his father's estate seemed a pittance compared to his present income, but he had no intention of letting it go.

When Colonel Slyke gave Hammer the name of Holmes Fitzpatrick it didn't sound like much to go on. Fitzpatrick had established his credentials as an army sharpshooter following his tour with a helicopter assault unit, and that linked expert marksmanship with flying. But so what? There was no telling how many such combinations might be uncovered. Hammer had no trouble finding Fitzpatrick and monitoring his movements. Holmes worked for a construction outfit and spent his weekends on the shooting circuits. He lived a relatively quiet life, maintained a small bank balance, and had made but one discernible change in his lifestyle. This was a notable increase in the amounts of money he wagered and his payments of losses in hard cash.

Hammer requested and was granted a search warrant and, with the authorities, entered Fitzpatrick's house while the man was away. It took about three hours for them to discover the cash secreted in a concealed compartment of a handsome gun case which contained a number of fine weapons. The sum was over fifty thousand dollars, and it was returned to its place.

With this break in the case, Hammer told his wife Mary, "Fitzpatrick did it. I'm sure we can nail him. But I think he got only

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a fraction of the money, otherwise he'd really be using it."

"Then who was the brains?" she asked, using the vernacular of the trade.

"We're going to monitor Fitzpatrick but not touch him until we find out. That's who'll have the money."

Pushing his luck with Colonel Slyke, Hammer sought and received help in tracing Fitzpatrick's record, his background with the assault unit. Numerous missions had been flown with various gunships, but there was one item in the record that stood out: a request by Fitzpatrick to be assigned to the crew of the chopper pilot who'd rescued him when his ship went down. The pilot was Captain William Dailey.

Hammer turned his attention to Dailey. From the service, he obtained handwriting samples which he returned to the experts along with the notes Lawrence Price had left with the Village Green apartment manager. The experts reported that the samples were strikingly similar if not identical.

Hammer got fingerprint records and personally took them, along with the prints lifted from the laundry room cabinet, to the crime lab. The results: the prints from the cabinet were William Dailey's.

When Hammer heard this he performed an uncharacteristic little jig, yanked the cigar butt from his mouth, and cried, "Hot damn!" At home during the evening his wife kept eyeing him, as though she could scarcely decide what to make of him. "You look," she said, "like the cat who's eaten the mouse."

Hammer settled down to figure out what he had. Alias Lawrence Price had, with a rented chopper, robbed the S&D bank. Price had rented an apartment in the Village Green apartments. He had changed a cabinet door. The fingerprints taken from the door were those of ex-military pilot William Dailey. This proved that Dailey was at the apartments. Did it prove that he and Price were the same? The odds against such a coincidence were a zillion to one, yet the evidence was, Hammer realized, circumstantial. To prove that Dailey committed the robbery he must find the money.

Hammer searched out Dailey's old address and found that the family had moved about a week after the robbery. He spoke to one of the neighbors, a young woman named Clark. "Oh, they've been gone a while," she said. "We hated to see them go. Especially Gloria."

"Do you know why they decided to move?"

"Bill got some money—from an inheritance, I think. I guess he thought he could put it to better use with a new start."

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"Where'd they go?"

"Arizona. Tucson. I really don't know their plans."

"Actually, I'm trying to run down some of Bill's family," Hammer said. "This inheritance—did they mention any details?"

"I think Gloria said an uncle of Bill's died. They'd been anticipating it for several months."

Returning to military records, Hammer found that Dailey's aunt and uncle—the Uncle William Dailey for whom Bill had been named—lived in Alexandria, Virginia. He contacted a local investigator to perform some legwork. Hammer was interested in Dailey's "inheritance." If there were any truth to it, Dailey might be able to explain the acquisition of some money; but its happening so soon after the robbery made it entirely suspect. In a couple of days the investigator, Lowery, got back to him.

"I found the elder William Dailey all right," he said. "He's alive and healthy. He took care of his nephew until young Dailey moved out. They've had little contact since."

"Is he well off?"

"I'd say not. Very moderate house, style of living. I did find out he'd been executor for the estate left to Dailey. But that's tied up for a few years yet."

"So Dailey's come into no inheritance."

"Not from these people. And as far as I can determine they're his only relatives," Lowery said.

"Where's Dailey now?"

"They didn't know. They expect to hear from him soon about the estate. Funny thing, though, Mr. Dailey wouldn't tell me anything until I explained why I was there."

"What did you explain?"

"That his nephew had applied for a job and we were running a security check. I told him it was confidential and not to mention it even to young Dailey. I think he swallowed it."

"Okay," said Hammer. "Thanks."

Hammer flew to Tucson. The evidence against William Dailey was mounting, but without the money it came down to very little. What had Dailey done with the currency? Perhaps spirited it out of the country long before now. Hammer's original enthusiasm took a downplunge. Recovery and conviction began to appear hopeless. He sat in his seat like an old mole, chewing his cigar with a vengeance. Dailey had made only one mistake, and that was to leave a fingerprint that in itself would never bring him into court. He had outwitted Hammer's security system.

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In Tucson, Hammer got his first look at William Dailey. Sitting in a rented van with a pair of binoculars, he spent a morning watching Dailey putter around his yard, go in and out of his workshop. Deciding he was too old for such reconnaissance, he enlisted help from the local authorities to monitor Dailey's movements for another couple of days. The man apparently didn't work. When Dailey left the house it was for various car trips. Yet his Mercedes and his house were not the trappings of an unwealthy man. Was it possible that he had the money secreted at his residence?

Hammer had Gloria Dailey tailed. At the market and the beauty shop she was seen writing checks. Hammer used his authority to make inquiries of the Tucson banks. He easily discovered an account in the name of William and Gloria Dailey. It took a phone call from the D. A. to get him into the bank's bookkeeping department.

"I just want to look over the Daileys' transactions," he told the pretty young girl who was assigned to assist him. "Especially the deposits."

"You know, the account's pretty new," she said, frowning over the readouts. "We show that the initial deposit was a cash one. There have been one or two deposits since."

As Hammer looked at the records he suddenly yanked the cigar butt from his teeth, hunched over the table like a defensive guard, and stared. A recent deposit was a direct transferral from the First Bank of Columbia, South Carolina, evidently a payment of interest on a certificate of deposit. "My God," he cried, "the man put the money in the bank!"

William Dailey's conversation with his uncle was, as usual, reserved if not cool. They discussed affairs of the small estate, and since Dailey didn't choose to reveal his present residence he requested that interest proceeds be deposited in his account in Alexandria. And as usual his uncle said, "You know, Bill, I think you should at least bring your wife and children to see us. What do you have now, two?"

"If we're ever up that way," Dailey said.

"We all make mistakes," said William. "You lived with us half your life, you know. I'd hate for your mother and father to know—"

"So would I," said Dailey. He could not bring himself to relinquish his bitterness.

His uncle sighed finally and said, "A man came here to ask us about you. We didn't know where you were but we told him good

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things about you, Bill."

Dailey was calling from a pay phone. He gripped the receiver tighter. "What man?"

"Someone running a security check on you. He asked us not to say anything but I figure you're entitled to know. You applying for a new job?"

"No—yes. When was this?"

"Few days ago. Is there anything you want us—"

"No," said Dailey. "I have to go. Say hello to Aunt Bess."

As Dailey hung up, he found that in his stomach was a feeling much as he'd experienced just before he took off for a chopper assault—tension, a thrill of fear, unease. Who could have traced him to his uncle? If it were someone from his past they would not have lied about their purpose; if someone were digging into his records, it could mean he was under investigation. Why?

Instead of returning home Dailey drove around, going over and over his steps from beginning to end. Where had he made a mistake? He could think of nothing that would implicate him in the robbery—except one thing. The money. It was possible that if the authorities had his name they would also discover the bank deposits. This, he realized, was the only way they could prove anything against him. He saw suddenly that the savings certificates were a mistake. He had been so thoughtful, so neat—perhaps too neat. But if he could move fast enough, if he could get the money withdrawn . . .

For the first time since he'd moved to Tucson, Dailey rented a small plane. He went home, packed a bag, provided Gloria with an excuse for being away a few days, and took off.

As quickly as he could get a flight, Sidney Hammer returned to Atlanta. Though excited, he didn't wish to jump so quickly he'd make a blunder; besides, there was no reason for Dailey to know he was under suspicion. When he reached his office at S&D, the first thing Hammer did was phone the First Bank of Columbia, and when he did, he felt that he'd had his wings broken with a double load.

"Yes," the bookkeeper told him, "our records show a William Dailey as a customer but his maximum deposit has been a hundred thousand dollars."

"A hundred thousand?" Hammer was looking for about two million. His heart sank. Dailey must have deposited some money to live on and gotten rid of the rest.

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"And even that's been withdrawn," the bookkeeper said.

"Withdrawn?"

"Just yesterday. Mr. Dailey paid a penalty in order to withdraw his certificate."

When Hammer hung up he let out a bellow that made several people in the outer office come running. He gave them a snarl, closed the door, broke out a new cigar—he hated having to nurse a new cigar down to the butt—and tried to recover his dignity. Where was all the money? Why had Dailey made an untimely withdrawal? Had he been tipped off or was there another explanation for it? Where the hell was the two million?

Hammer puffed furiously and, enshrouded in smoke, stared at the pigeons strutting on the ledge beyond his glass. Suddenly he slammed his fist down. Maybe Dailey had not gotten the money out of the country. Maybe he'd made deposits in five banks, ten—twenty. Of course! Except by breaking the currency down, how else could he have made unsuspicious deposits? But what banks? What city—state?

Hammer called in all available personnel. "I want you to start phoning every bank within two hundred miles. Section off the states and each of you take an area. We want to know if William Dailey is a customer and the amount of his deposits."

"You mean call every bank?" someone said.

"Every bank. Even the small towns. It'll be faster than trying to get the local authorities on it. I need this yesterday."

Before the banks closed, Hammer's people had found two banks which had held certificates for William Dailey, but both gave the same report: the deposits had been withdrawn within the last seventy-two hours. Why was the man doing this? Was it coincidental, or had Dailey been tipped off? Hammer could only assume the worst—Dailey had surmised he was under investigation and was recapturing his money with frightening speed. How was he doing this? He'd have to surrender his certificates at each bank. Of course: he was a pilot. To get to the banks so rapidly, he'd have to be flying.

Hammer called in S&D pilot Griggs and spread out a map of the southeastern states. On this he circled the towns where Dailey had made his withdrawals.

"We're still calling banks to find out where he has, or had, deposits. Take a look at this."

Griggs examined the map.

"There may be a pattern here," said Hammer. "He's hit these three banks. They aren't far apart—almost in a line. He's probably

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calculated his route in some kind of pattern to save time. He must be flying. What's the chance he'd file a flight plan?"

"Little to none," said Griggs.

"Okay. All we can do is find the banks he's used and try to figure where he'll go next."

"Can't you get a federal judge to freeze those certificates?"

"Yeah, maybe, when I find them. But I want Dailey."

By plotting the banks where Dailey had made deposits Hammer established some logical boundaries, and within these his staff continued their furious telephone bombardment. They had the advantage, for bookkeeping departments could be reached after floor transactions had been closed. Still, two additional accounts were discovered just after withdrawals had been made. Hammer realized that if Dailey knew they were onto him, at some point he'd take the money he had been able to withdraw and flee.

William Dailey had been only peripherally conscious of the fact that all the banks he'd chosen were in towns that had airfields, even the small ones. Now he realized that some warning system had perhaps informed him that he might need to get to his money quickly and to get away quickly.

Dailey flew into two, three, four towns, parked the plane or left it for servicing, caught a cab or rented a car, drove to the bank holding his deposit, made his withdrawal, returned to the airport and flew to the next town. The withdrawals were time-consuming and costly. For premature withdrawal, penalties were assessed, and on withdrawals of that size a bank officer always questioned the customer at length. Expecting this, Dailey had invented an elaborate explanation of his withdrawal and in the long run he received his money.

When Dailey flew into Memphis, he grabbed a cab at the airport, handed the driver a twenty dollar bill, and told him to break the rules; nevertheless, they were late and he reached the Central Bank of Tennessee just after it had closed. For a few moments he stood at the door, trying to decide what to do. He didn't like staying anywhere long. Flying to another town at this hour would accomplish nothing. Finally he decided to wait until the bank opened in the morning, and he instructed his driver to take him to a motel.

As a rule, when Sidney Hammer confronted a problem, he terminated contact with everyone, hunched down at his desk, gnawed on his cigar butt as a canine attacks a leathery bone, and went into

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a trance of concentration. Now he paced the floor, disturbing the pigeons beyond his window, hands buried in pockets, the only thing characteristic about his attitude the mutilated cigar. It appeared that William Dailey had with criminal ingenuity or incredible good luck broken Hammer's security system, made off with a fortune, and, in a moment of crisis, initiated a procedure for snatching the money from under their noses for the second time. Hammer was beginning to think their time had run out when one of the girls who had been canvassing the banks walked into his office just minutes before bookkeeping operations would normally be closing down.

"I found a deposit," she said, "on the Central Bank of Tennessee. So far it's still there."

Hammer glanced at his watch, confirming the time. "Dailey can't get to it today. About a hundred thousand?"

"Yes," she said.

"Okay. Those are the deposits he's going after." Hammer drove his fist into the palm of his hand. "Hot damn, we've finally jumped ahead of him!"

He called in Griggs and they took a look at their map. "Columbia, Charlotte, Nashville, and a couple of points between. He could be making a circle, heading for Florida maybe."

"Memphis would fit in," said Griggs.

"There may be others but he could be on his way. Or he might reverse the pattern, change his procedure to throw us off."

"Or," Griggs said, "he could be headed for Memphis right now."

Hammer thought for a moment, shifted his cigar, monitored his gut feeling, and decided. "Get the helicopter ready. We're going to Memphis."

When Dailey walked into the Central Bank of Tennessee the moment the doors opened, he wasn't the only one who'd had a sleepless night. Hammer had spent the night working with the FBI and local authorities on his case. What needed to be done, when and if Dailey showed up in Memphis, was done.

Though Dailey was in a hurry, he entered the bank, suitcase and briefcase in hand, with an attitude of excitement. The only hint he'd had that he might be under scrutiny was the inquiry made of his Uncle William; how distantly or how closely he might be associated with the S&D robbery he didn't know, but there was something thrilling about retrieving the money, something akin

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to pulling off the robbery for the second time. He didn't know law but he assumed that if his deposits were discovered they could be frozen. Beyond all else he had to protect his wife and children. Getting money out of the banks, perhaps out of the country, required an operation of speed, cunning, and risk.

Dailey was dressed in a business suit and he kept his manner casual. He approached one of the bank secretaries, presenting his certificate, and told her, "I'd like to withdraw this deposit. I know there'll be a penalty."

The young lady looked at the certificate, noticing the sum. "For this amount we'll need one of the officers."

"All right," he said. "I'm in a hurry, if you please."

As she stood to lead Dailey into Mr. Rand's office, Sidney Longhorn Hammer, sitting casually in one of the upholstered chairs in the lobby's waiting area, spoke to an agent on his right. "That's Dailey. We've got him."

The agent nodded and gave a signal to men stationed near the front and side doors, in the event Dailey somehow became suspicious and made a run for it.

In Mr. Rand's office, William Dailey explained, "I'm sorry to say I must withdraw these funds. If you don't mind, I'd like cash."

Neither Rand nor anyone else in the bank had been told what was happening. The banker's reaction was therefore what Dailey had come to expect. "Is something wrong, Mr. Dailey? I hope you haven't found the bank inadequate."

"Frankly, I've decided to invest in a hot business venture," Dailey said. "Win, lose, or draw, I can afford it. My people want cash." He answered a few more questions, then said with a practiced degree of impatience, "Is there some problem? I have a right to withdraw my money, do I not?"

"Of course, of course," Rand said. "A bank's procedure when a large withdrawal is made is to be sure the customer isn't under some kind of duress." He gave a little laugh. "You know, we want to be sure you're not the victim of extortion or something."

Dailey smiled pleasantly, enjoying the irony of this. "I understand. I assure you everything's fine and I know exactly what I'm doing."

"All right. Sign here and we'll get your money."

Dailey endorsed the certificate, then followed Rand into a conference room where he was asked to count his money with a cashier. As he did this he placed the currency in his briefcase.

In the lobby, the agent sitting beside Hammer said, "We'll let

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him claim the money. There's no need to rush it now. It's that much better if he has the cash on him."

"Agreed," said Hammer. From his pocket he took a brand new cigar, removed the paper, and added, "I have all the time in the world."

William Dailey emerged from the conference room swinging his briefcase with the jauntiness of a man well acquainted with success. His intention was to catch a cab to the airport, take the plane, and fly south. He was halfway across the lobby when Sidney Hammer, smoking his new cigar, intercepted him and said with the undisguised pleasure of one who has won a difficult contest, "Mr. Dailey? So glad to meet you at last. I'm Sidney Hammer, security chief for S&D banks."

Dailey halted as if shot. It took a full moment for him to register what had been said. Before he could react, the federal agent, flashing his credentials, said, "William Dailey, you're under arrest. The charge against you is robbery."

Dailey stood still another moment, then leaned down to set the briefcase on the floor. He placed it at a precise right angle to his feet. He rose and, as if instinctively recognizing his counterpart, said to Hammer, "Where did the mission fail?"

Hammer extracted his cigar with a certain grudging respect. "You're neat, Mr. Dailey. Very neat and accommodating. You left a print on a door you repaired for your landlady."

Dailey remembered, clearly recognized his mistake, but did not flinch. "My wife and kids," he said.

"Yes, what about them?"

Dailey's look was unflagging.

Hammer thought for a moment, jammed the cigar between his teeth, and said without pity, "Maybe when they grow up they'll remember what a nice thief their father was."

He stepped aside to let the agent handcuff Dailey and lead him out of the bank.

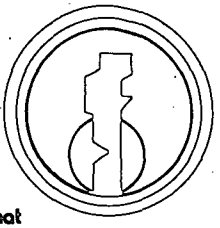
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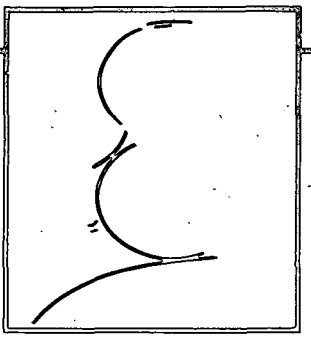
Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy in *48 Hrs.*

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Police detective Jack Cates, played by Nick Nolte, breaks all the rules. In an attempt to save another policeman, one being held hostage, he gives up his gun to a dangerous killer, who then goes on a killing spree with it. Cates breaks another rule of professionalism when he lets his pursuit of the killer become a personal crusade. Desperately hoping to be led to his man, he forges a weekend pass for a black convict—a former confederate of the killer—who can show him the way. The movie's title tells it: Nolte and his convict have just 48 Hrs. to do the job.

Nolte and Eddie Murphy, the comedian from television's *Saturday Night Live,* make an Odd Couple kind of team. Nolte wants to find the killer for revenge and because his reputation is on the line; Murphy wants the same man for having put him in jail. To get the job done, the team combines underworld tips and the painstaking routine of police stakeouts and questioning.

The action is fast and brutal. Criminals, hookers, and other lowlifes are briefly but vividly etched. They are all violent and profane. But although what appears on screen is shocking enough, it feels necessary, so that one never has the feeling of being exploited.

Nolte, blonde and hulking, breaks friendships as regularly as rules. His bass voice suggests a load of wet gravel sliding off a dump truck. His "partner," Murphy, decked out

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in a five hundred dollar Georgio Armani suit, knows he'll soon have to return to prison, but he remains as witty and lighthearted as Nolte is worn and tired. The two of them go together as naturally as Holmes and Watson—or Don Quixote and Sancho Panza for that matter. Nolte and Murphy are certain to be back in another movie.

Director-producer Blake Edwards has managed to piece together old film clips of the late Peter Sellers as Inspector Clouseau to make yet another *Pink Panther* movie. **Trail of the Pink Panther** contains some hilarious scenes—most of them never used in the movies they were intended for. These scenes are skillfully alternated with new footage of the series' regular stars. David Niven is back as the suave super criminal, the Phantom; Herbert Lom is Clouseau's frantic boss; and Capucine is once again the love interest.

For a short time the old footage convincingly shows the bumbling Clouseau-Sellers getting ready to go out on a new case, and it appears as if this is going to be the best *Pink Panther* in a long time. But Clouseau soon disappears (we never learn whether or not he has been killed), and the plot stops short. The rest of the movie consists of a TV reporter's attempt to tell the missing Clouseau's life story through interviews with those who knew him.

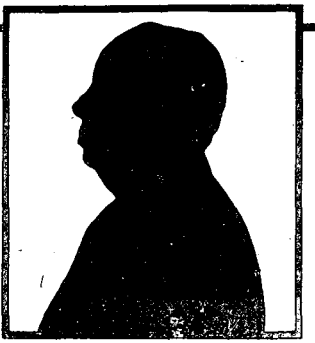
Trail of the Pink Panther probably should have been a documentary on Sellers as Inspector Clouseau. But even as an imperfect addition to the *Pink Panther* series, it's well worth seeing.

The current Broadway play by Anthony Shaffer, author of *Sleuth,* is **Whodunnit**, a comic English country house mystery. All the conventions are observed: in fact, Shaffer has, as usual, prominently included discussions in which the characters try to recall what would happen next in a fictional mystery.*Whodunnit* has no big star but instead ten experienced character actors. They lay on their eccentricities pretty thickly, but there is a plot twist that justifies the over-acting. The rest of the plot is nicely intricate and satisfying, except where, like many contemporary English playwrights, Shaffer once again finds it necessary to get his laughs from jokes about homosexuality.

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FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



A feeling of doom surrounds the haggard, grim-looking, chain-smoking private investigator as he peers through the San Francisco fog. Somewhere lurking in the smoke and darkness are a vanished prey, betrayal, death. Although the new film version of the Joe Gores novel, *Hammett*, has as its central character the creator, **Dashiell Hammett**, rather than any of that writer's famed detective characters—made possible in a crime film because Hammett himself served time as a Pinkerton operative—there are interesting overlaps. Hammett the fledgling writer (in an early version of the film's screenplay) is allowed this moment of inspiration, while striving to give his character a name: "He'd be what every private detective I know wished they were and what some of them thought to come close to in their cockier moments. He'd be a hard and shifty fellow with a face like Satan's. Yeah. He'd be a blond Satan. . . . [And his name] would be like it came out of the grave . . . Spade. How's that, huh? A guy named Sam Spade . . . " The impact of that hard and shifty guy and his creator extended to films as well.

The real Hammett, after the success of his 1930 novel, *The Maltese Falcon,* was brought to Hollywood as a screenwriter to work on a number of film projects. He provided the original story for *City Streets* (1931), in which a young Gary Cooper plays "The Kid," starting out in the beer rackets and squaring off against his

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gangster boss. He also wrote the plots for *Woman in the Dark* (1934), with a paroled convict as hero, and *Mister Dynamite* (1935), starring Edmund Lowe as a private eye investigating the murder of a concert pianist—a complex little puzzle in which the death gun is triggered by a piano key.

In the meantime, the *Maltese Falcon* had been turned into a popular 1931 feature starring Ricardo Cortez. In 1936 it was remade as *Satan Met a Lady*, with Spade, now called Ted Shayne (played by Warren William), pursuing a jewel-filled horn. Then, ten years after the first version, novice director John Huston took the book—adhering to its dialogue almost word for word—and fashioned it into a screen classic. Everything was right about this definitive detective movie; it almost single-handedly established the *film noir* genre. Curiously, Humphrey Bogart, cast as Spade, was never to play him again, nor was anyone else. Spade did not return to the screen, though he has been parodied often in films like *The Maltese Bippie* and *The Cheap Detective*. (In *The Black Bird,* George Segal plays Spade's son for comedy.)

The Glass Key was Hammett's favorite among his own books, and it was filmed twice—starring George Raft in 1935 and Alan Ladd in 1942. Both versions reflect the dark union that joins corrupt politics with the crime underworld, a grim Hammett vision. But his outlook was not always black. *The Thin Man* was as cheerful a murder mystery as a hardboiled writer could possibly create. Nick Charles and his wife Nora, mixing martinis and crime, came to the screen in 1934, out of Hammett's book published the same year. Light-hearted and sophisticated, the movie (starring William Powell and Myrna Loy) was an instant success and inspired five sequels in which the couple do not allow their newborn offspring to prevent them from finding murder at racetracks, nightclubs, and rustic retreats.

Secret Agent X-9 and *The Fat Man,* also Hammett creations, have found their way into films, and *The Dain Curse* has become a television miniseries.But Hammett was to lose his way in the Hollywood vineyards, and the intensity of his creative fervor ended. He did the screenplay for the 1943 film made from his friend Lillian Hellman's stage success, *Watch on the Rhine,* a wartime drama. While certainly powerful (it won for actor Paul Lukas an Academy Award), it missed the terse movement, dark streets, and truly native crime for which the mystery film should be forever grateful to the influence of Dashiell Hammett.

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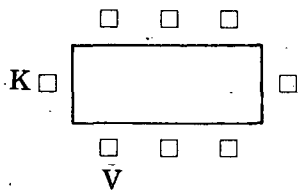
UNSOLVED

by George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the May issue.

Harry and his wife, Harriet, gave a dinner party to which they invited: his brother, Barry, and Barry's wife, Barbara; his sister, Samantha, and Samantha's husband, Samuel; and his neighbor, Nathan, and Nathan's wife, Natalie. While they were all seated at the table, one person produced a gun and shot another person. The chairs were arranged around the table as in the diagram below:



1. The killer sat in the chair marked *K*
2. The victim sat in the chair marked *V*.
3. Every man sat opposite his wife.
4. The host was the only man who sat between two women (i.e., to the left of one and to the right of another, around the perimeter of the table.)
5. The host did not sit next to his sister.
6. The hostess did not sit next to the host's brother.
7. The victim was the killer's former spouse.

Which one of the eight was the killer?

"The Rectangular Table," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction *by George J. Summers, copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*

See page 154 for the solution to the March puzzle.

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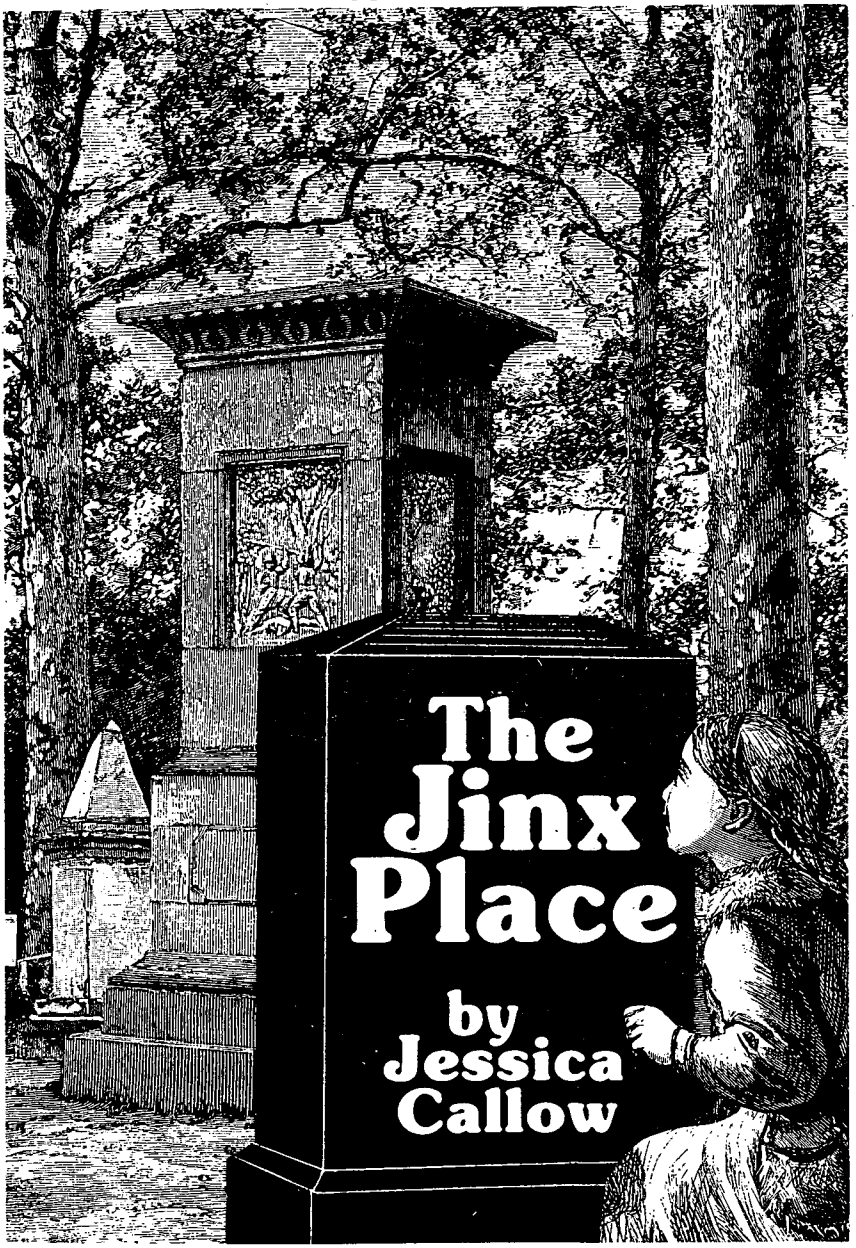


Illustration by Marc Yankus

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Uncle Don Ruff's help on weekends was the only way this story got going. "But it's to be written your way, Sallie," he said. "Grandpa will help."

Grandma said, flat out from the start, that she wouldn't have a thing to do with it, she arguing with Uncle Don and Grandpa about its being unseemly for a twelve-year-old girl to be writing about murders.

"Sallie's different," Uncle Don said. "And who better to tell it than the one who discovered all that was going on? Besides, this way she'll get the whole thing out of her mind."

"So right," Grandpa said. "A girl needs to know about how people really are. Women aren't sheltered as once they were." But later, as we struggled, Grandpa said, "Hell, we'll never get this thing off the ground without Grandma." So, as it turned out, Grandma was the best help after all, she having been a teacher before she married Grandpa.

From Great Bay, the northern Canadian city, they had both come to live in Nobley, six miles south. "Country cousin to Great Bay," is how Grandpa George Ruff describes Nobley, where he had his hardware store for forty-five years. The forest area northward, being lumber country, fathered the nearby town of Knoxley, the lake port where freight and oil tankers put in for loading and for repairs. Boat building in Knoxley provides employment and support for varieties of trades. Westward, Indian Ridge, once but a summer camp, now with ski run, hotels, and restaurants, is a holiday resort year round. The "country cousin" is a hub, a connecting link with all the surrounding activity. Families, too, are closely interrelated.

I was three at the time that my Dad Elwood and Mom Nell were killed in the car accident. In a way it made little change for me, since I'd lived with Grandma and Grandpa all my life. Mom and Dad, working in the store, had been Elwood and Nell to everyone, although Mom's name was Elinor. That was how I heard of them from everyone. I do remember missing them a lot, and the happy times we had. And never can I forget how young and goodlooking they both were because Grandma has their pictures on the piano in the parlor. So they're smiling down at me when I go in to practice.

In the beginning, Ned and Maggie Haskins's farm, bordering on Nobley, covered a lot of territory, reaching back to Highway 90I that runs from Toronto into the northern resort areas. Each week we bought fresh eggs there. Ned's big farmhouse stood back at about the center of his property, remote and pretty, with lots of

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shade trees around it. A long, rutted lane led to it.

"Only time Ned puts any gravel on this lane is when he's bogged down in the spring. And then I bet Maggie measures it out for him with a teaspoon," Grandpa used to say. "Hanged if we don't have eggs scrambled by the time we get home."

From Nobley to the highway, down the gravel side road, is about six miles. Half a mile from that corner to where thick forest starts in real earnest, and continues solidly for miles, were Ned's three acres of hazard land, a place that gave him so much trouble he named it the Jinx Place. Many other names he had for it that I can't mention here. A broad wedge of land it was, rough-treed and rock-strewn, boulders as big as houses in some spots. A natural spring had, of recent years, burst up below to form a bog that spread about the foot of it, a growing threat to Ned's adjacent wheatfield and pasturing acres. Not to mention that the spot formed a natural lair for a marauding fox clan.

A fine horse, finding its way in there, Ned had had to shoot, broken-legged among the rocks; which loss was followed by a heifer managing to strangle itself while rubbing its neck in the fork of a wind-twisted pine tree. And as if that were not enough, that same summer, a motorist having stopped for a rest, intrigued with the wild beauty of the place and the patch of meadow in the center, berry bushes flourishing there, had lit a fire to cook his meal, starting a grass fire that reached the forest proper and the wheatfield before it could be put out.

"That was the year you were born, Sallie," Grandpa told me. "Boy! We'd the whole town out fighting that fire. Folk came from a hundred miles around to help. We set up a food and rest place in the Town Hall, and the women cooked and provided food; that is, all the women but Maggie Haskins. Not so much as a slice of bread did Maggie bring. And her wheatfield and house and barn it was that we labored to save. Complaint was all we got from Maggie, about how long it took us to get that fire out."

"I've had it with that Jinx Place," Ned had complained bitterly to Grandpa. "George, how much would it cost me to fence her off, all round?"

Grandpa's estimate for sufficient wire fencing almost caused Ned to explode. Practically foaming at the mouth he was as he went off to ponder the outlay of a small fortune. But even as he groaned and moaned a solution came out of the blue that Ned could hardly believe. The Town Council put out a tender for land for the Nobley cemetery site, the churchyard being well beyond further accom-

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modation. It wasn't a matter of lowest bid, Ned's was the only offer. His description of "that prime piece of land" hardly tallied with the names he'd called the Jinx Place previously.

"What's the hindrance to drive a mile or two and have an attractive place, made to order you might say, for folk to rest in, so peaceful and quiet it is. I'll throw in that part where the spring is, so long as you agree to channel the water to the forest river, and fence her clean across."

Ned's Jinx Place was accepted, surveyed, paid for, and fenced, the spring capped and piped to the top for cemetery use, and the overflow channelled toward the forest river. A handsome fieldstone entrance from the highway, with wrought iron gates and bronze plaque set into the stonework, proclaimed it Nobley Cemetery.

"Never did I expect to see the day that that Jinx Place would bring me any sort of good," Ned told Grandpa. "Cash, and a right good fence into the bargain that didn't cost me a dime. Not only that, George, the council agreed to a fine burial plot for Maggie and me. Now, if that ain't good bargaining you tell me."

That's how the Nobley Cemetery came to be out in that lonely place; and how my Dad Elwood and Mom Nell came to be buried there. A deserted, silent place but for the howl of winter winds, and happy birdsong in the spring. Rarely visited, except when a funeral cortege lingered briefly.

Lonely, that is, until Grandpa bought the piece of property at the Nobley side road corner and Highway 90I, that too having been a part of Ned Haskins's farm, and but a stone's throw from the Jinx Place. But by the time Grandpa bought that piece of land both Ned and his wife Maggie had been gone for almost a year, carried off that winter—within a week of each other—during the epidemic of virulent flu.

"Ned hadn't bargained to occupy his cemetery plot so soon," Grandpa said. "I've the feeling his Jinx Place got the better of him in the end, somehow."

"I suppose it was lucky their Rosalie married when she did," was Grandma's comment. "At least she's a husband to help her with the farm. A crying shame, all the money the Haskinses had and Maggie never had that girl's teeth attended to. A miracle for Rosalie, Jack's appearing on the scene."

"Jack Windermere did all right for himself, too," Grandpa said. "I did wonder at Ned's taking him on at the time. Had Jack stood alongside that scarecrow in Ned's field, it would have been hard to figure out which was which. In one year Jack changed so much

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I hardly recognized him for the same person. And since he turned out to be the best hired man Ned ever had—you know Ned, Maggie too, crafty schemers the pair of 'em—they'd figure that as well as a husband for Rosalie, they'd have hired help to work permanently for next to nothing. I suppose we should give Ned and Maggie their due, they were tip-top farmers."

"Well, now Jack gets the farm, but he also gets Rosalie. And the worst of Ned and Maggie he's got in her. Maggie's disposition alone would scare off the hardiest. Can't say I envy Jack."

"The baby coming will change her."

Rosalie, even more mean dispositioned than Maggie, had inherited the physical faults of both parents, too: Ned's sleepy, bulging eyes, his sloping shoulders, his high-pitched, rasping voice; this with her mother's drab hair, protruding teeth, short, broad-hipped figure, and tendency to put on weight, and these were the factors disposing her to discontent. For above everything, Rosalie longed for a husband and family. The day Jack Windermere came to the Haskins farm, life took a turn for both Jack and Rosalie.

As Jack's haggard look vanished, a fairly handsome face revealed itself. The pale grey eyes lost their leaden look, though the hardness of the straight mouth stayed. Unsmiling he was, his long face dark, permanently stamped with the hardships of his poverty-stricken earlier days. But by the end of the year he stood straighter, looking tall, and there came a swing into his long stride. For all that, nonetheless, there was an air about him, almost a mystery, a strange look in those cold grey eyes; determined eyes, with never a hint of mirth in them.

The conquest for Rosalie was perhaps made all the sweeter for the reason that her closest friend, Gennie Briggs, a goodlooking girl in town, had, in those later months, cast enticing eyes on Jack, a permanent end to her friendship with Rosalie resulting. But not for one second did Jack waver in his choice. From the first it was Rosalie. Or, perhaps, as many said, it was Ned Haskins's farm.

For Grandpa, with Dad Elwood gone, the hardware store was a burden. "What's the good?" he said. "I kept it on for Elwood. Don wants no part of it. He's doing first-rate in the city; top man now with that insurance company. Besides, Phoebe'd never agree to living in a country town like Nobley."

"That one," Grandma snapped. "Ha! Might break a fingernail should you ask her to work in the store."

"Fee's good at her modelling job, Addie," Grandpa said. "Her line of work is something the likes of us don't know much about. She

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sees to it that Don's happy. That counts with me."

Grandma's head was high, as it gets when she's ready for an argument. Not that she dislikes Aunt Fee. It's the modelling that makes her think of naked ladies and sirens, and she doesn't like to think that Uncle Don is associated with all that.

Grandpa avoided an argument by switching back to the sale of the hardware business. "Sooner we sell the better. The store and the house. This house is too big for us now. I'd like to move out of town anyhow. Buy a good-sized lot and put up a place to our liking is what I have in mind."

Grandma jumped on that fast. "A little bungalow, George. No stairs to clean and climb."

"Good patch of garden and a few hens. There's property for sale on the outskirts of the city, not far from where Don and Fee live."

That really sent Grandma rearing. "George, how can you suggest such a thing? How'd I ever be able to take care of Elwood and Nell in the cemetery if we went that far away!"

Care of the two graves in Nobley Cemetery is Grandma's constant concern. Being near enough to care for them regularly gives her a feeling of Dad Elwood and Mom Nell's not having gone totally beyond her reach. It's become almost as though they never left us.

"Well, now." Grandpa's mind was running over places he'd seen and liked. "Wonder if—you know that treed corner of Ned's place, Nobley side road and the 90I, wonder if—d'you suppose Jack Windermere—"

"You mean build down at the Nobley side road corner? Oh, George. I could walk down the road and visit Elwood and Nell any time."

"We just about live down there as it is. I'll talk to Jack next time Sallie and me goes over for eggs."

That's how we came to live in the new house that Grandpa built at the Nobley side road, on a good-sized piece of what once had been Ned Haskins's property, but a stone's throw from the Nobley Cemetery. Jack, deciding he might as well make further fast cash, parcelled off two whole strips of land facing the side road, as well as several lots fronting the highway; and named the project Windermere Corners.

"It'll bring other families, with children for our little Sallie to play with," Grandpa said.

I was five the spring we moved into the new bungalow, barely finished and needing much work still. Grandma's rosy face was pinker than usual, making her blue eyes look bluer than ever.

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With her silver hair she's the prettiest grandma ever. She's tall, elegant, and quite stern looking. Grandpa says that's because she was a teacher before they were married. Her smile doesn't make one feel at ease the way Grandpa's does. But she's very kind, and is always helping somebody.

Grandpa Ruff doesn't really need to smile, his face is pleasant all over all of the time. The grey of his hair is the same as his eyes, the shade of old pewter mugs on our kitchen dresser. But no, that's not right at all, because his eyes twinkle so bright at times you'd think he had diamonds hidden in them. It's a mischief that I never see in Grandma's eyes. Grandpa, Aunt Fee, and I are good at pretend. Grandma and Uncle Don are straight out and no pretend.

My hair is blonde, like Grandma's used to be, rippling in wide waves. My hazel eyes and brows are like Mom Nell's, and like Dad Elwood and Grandpa, I have a mouth that's well shaped but large; with their wide grin, it's lucky for me I've pretty teeth.

"Which of them do I most look like, Grandpa?" I ask, as we look at them in the picture on the piano.

"Both, I think. But then you're prettier than either."

My full name is Salina Mary Ruff, but most of the time I'm called Sallie. I wasn't old enough to attend school when we moved to the new house. One has to be six; but Grandma taught me to write and to spell, and she's very particular about my reading the Bible. She's good at teaching music, too.

That first winter at the new house wasn't easy. For one thing it was the stormiest, and coldest, winter on record. We were snowed up for days, repeatedly. When the plough pushed the snow back off the road, the piles were higher than the house. And along the side roads, where winds had swept across the fields, snowdrifts reached to the crossbars of the telephone poles.

That was a terrible winter for Jack Windermere, too. He lost Rosalie and the baby. Rosalie died in childbirth. They both lie in the Nobley Cemetery, not far from Ned and Maggie. The cold and the snow of that winter meant that a great deal of the time I couldn't get out to play. Grandpa read stories aloud, and we watched television. Mostly Grandpa watched the news, which is how I came to name my new doll Esther Mae. "It's that gun moll again," Grandpa called to Grandma, busy with supper in the kitchen. "She and the boyfriend have shot a bank teller, and got away with enough to keep the pair of 'em for the rest of their lives."

"Which isn't going to be very long." Grandma had come to watch, and to say that supper was ready. "Thank goodness we've no such

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thing to contend with here."

"Why does the man call her Moll when her name is—" I got sidetracked, as the picture of Esther Mae's lover was flashed on the screen. "He looks almost as nice as Uncle Don," I said.

"He's not at all like Uncle Don," Grandma snapped. "Come, it's time for supper. Afterwards, I want you to memorize another verse of that psalm."

I was happy to have such a pretty name for my new doll. And Grandma didn't seem to mind, for she's been reading the Book of Esther. And then I realized she hadn't heard the gun moll lady's name. I was about to explain, but she said, "Less talk, Sallie. Eat your supper."

Memorizing psalms isn't too bad. It's a good way to put off having to go to bed. Bedtimes can be dragged out no end if you're careful. It's after supper, mostly, that Grandpa and Grandma have interesting talks. I'm not supposed to hear, I know, but it's lonely in my room down at the far end of the hall, boring, too. Grandma says it's sneaky listening to grownups and not letting them know you're there. I can see how she feels I need the Bible reading, and Sunday School. She's right, I can't seem to want to conquer sin.

Uncle Don, who is an insurance claims investigator in Toronto, gave Jack Windermere help in the sale of his land lots, he knowing a good bit about the law, too. Just about every Sunday, through the summer, Uncle Don and Aunt Fee came and spent the day.

"Jack's going to have a hard time selling those land lots," Uncle Don said. "For retired folk like yourself, Dad, it's okay. But it's a long way for kids to go to school. What'll you do about Sallie?"

"It's but a mile to the little school over on the next side road. I'll drive her. Good weather, and she'll have her bike by then."

"I get the feeling that Jack intends to milk that farm for all the money he can get out of it. Then he'll sell out and leave. Can you imagine Ned selling off good farmland like this?"

"Jack doesn't really know how to manage that farm without Ned," Grandpa said. "Anyway, can't say I blame him for wanting to move away after all that's happened. Folk hereabouts don't understand Jack, and he behaves like he's suspicious of everything they say or do. Gets their dander up. On top of that there's rank hatred in some that an outsider fell heir to Ned's farm."

But within a year of our occupying the new house, Jack was successfully selling the land lots. Houses were going up, and lots were being sold to those planning for a future day. And Windermere Corners was, more or less, an established community.

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Even so, it was a bad year for Jack because of the spiteful things people were saying: like how he'd let Rosalie die, not getting her to the hospital at the time the baby was coming. And then there was a lot of talk afterwards, about his having Gennie Briggs over so much of the time; that was after Rosalie was gone.

"Friend of Rosalie's Gennie was, before they'd a falling out over Jack," Grandpa told Uncle Don. "Plain as day that Gennie's set her sights to fill Rosalie's shoes. As for Jack's letting Rosalie die, well, if he'd started out with her that night of the terrible blizzard, they'd have ended up frozen to death. Snowploughs were useless; winds ninety miles an hour. Telephone lines down and power off for most of the night. I'm sure Jack did the best he knew how. No doctor could have got near her, that's for sure. And how was either Jack or Rosalie to think the baby would come that night, with still two months to go?"

"Can't say I'm surprised that people are hostile to Jack," Uncle Don said. "I've the feeling there's a mean streak in him. And mighty peculiar, isn't it, Ned, Maggie, the whole Haskins family gone?"

"Ned wouldn't have a doctor no matter how sick he was. Kept going when he could barely crawl. For his animals Ned would have the vet out at first crack of something wrong. For himself, no time for doctors, many's the time he told me that. Plenty there were besides Ned and Maggie who were knocked off that winter with the bad flu."

Then Jack surprised everyone by donating two land lots next to the cemetery to the community. "For a memorial church site," he said. He himself put up a fieldstone cairn there, into which he set a bronze plaque inscribed, "In memory of John Windermere." "My father," Jack explained. "A kinder, holier man never lived. Not for one day do I get him out of my mind."

"You see, Don," Grandma said. "You misjudged Jack, as so many others here did."

The rumors stopped, and almost overnight Gennie Briggs began to get competition.

"What else would you expect?" Grandpa said. "A not bad looking feller with a first-rate farm, money in the bank besides."

This I heard one night when I was supposed to be in bed. I'd made myself comfortable in the hall with pillow and blanket and then had fallen asleep, which was how Grandma came to find out about my listening. Listening to grownups when I'm not supposed to has always been my greatest sin. It wouldn't surprise me if I should be struck with leprosy and end my days as an outcast.

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Jack Windermere liked Grandpa, I know from how he would include an extra half dozen eggs in our order. Never, ever would Ned or Maggie have done that. And I got the feeling—though he was scary at times, the way his eyes were and his mouth set in a tight line—that Jack liked Grandma and me, too. It was like he wanted to, but didn't know how to go about it.

Once, when Grandma baked a cake for us to take over—that was after Rosalie was gone—Jack, hardly knowing what to say, his chin sort of trembly and his eyes getting red, mumbled: "Never before—can't remember a soul—nobody ever—well, I never! Sallie, please say a big thank you to your grandma for me." It was almost as though he suddenly experienced an overwhelming grief that left him tongue-tied.

I came to like Jack, in spite of things Uncle Don said. Jack was different after Rosalie was gone. As Grandpa said: "Opened up, Jack has, surprisingly." (But I think it was only to Grandpa that Jack felt free to talk. Grandpa has that effect on people.) There was the pony ride in the farmyard one day, Jack's arm steadying me as he walked solemnly alongside, so that I shouldn't be frightened. Then there was the bouncy ride on his tractor, the length of a short furrow, another time we visited the farm; me sitting on Jack's knee, thrilled at the closeness of the roaring engine and the smell of diesel fuel. Who wouldn't like a man who took time to do all that?

When the Briggs family sold their business in Nobley for a handsome sum and moved away, there was much speculation as to which young lady might be the next Mrs. Windermere. Jack seemed in no hurry about that. Moving away didn't put any crimp in Gennie's style, though, for she turned up regularly, at least once a week, driving her own car, sometimes staying for a day or two.

For two summers Grandma and I tended the graves. Mostly I played house on the high part of the cemetery, among the rocks and rooty, wind-bent trees, making my own secret hideout. The old jinx of the place was surely gone, and although people came there to be put to rest in the ground, all sadness had taken place elsewhere. It was a happy place for Grandma and me. Saplings of birch and maple had flourished into shade trees. Seats and arbors stood in selected spots, covered with vines of wild grape and hops. Below, marsh marigold and forget-me-not gloried the swamp spot still; and where briar roses mingled with the tangle of berry bushes, hummingbirds and bees were busy as could be. Water from the spring had been piped to the top. There a tap gave us water for the

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plants and flowers we left on the graves.

Marking Ned's and Maggie's graves were elaborate monuments put up by Rosalie, in a surprising outlay of cash. For Rosalie counted every cent of every dollar. Indeed, she foresaw an opportunity by purchasing burial plots from people moving away, or from those in need of ready cash. It was Rosalie who showed Grandma and me the plots she had bought, ranged throughout the cemetery, the day she came to see the stones erected for Ned and Maggie.

"Pouncing like a hawk on every bargain," Grandma said to Uncle Don. "Owns plots all over the cemetery. She said she'd calculated the cost of future surveys and would sell at a profit."

By contrast, where Rosalie and her stillborn baby lay, only a tiny numbered marker indicated the spot.

After two years many stones there were, for people whom none of us knew, from places other than Nobley. And I'd identify them to Grandma as being "a new one next to one of Rosalie's."

Then Jack announced that he had sold the farm and would soon be leaving.

"Can't say I'm surprised," Grandpa said, talking to Uncle Don. "Been saying for two years that he would."

It wasn't until a few days before he went away that Grandpa discovered Jack could neither read nor write beyond his name, which had led to many misunderstandings between himself and people of the community. That same day I discovered the hating side of Jack that had sometimes made his face scary for me; like it was twisted out of shape, and grey. Sometimes his unsmiling, grim look had made me think of Job, in his trouble with the Lord. "My face is foul with weeping," Job said. And sometimes Jack had that weeping, beaten-down look.

He was looking that way the last day Grandpa and I went over for the eggs. There'd been some trouble about Gennie. Her father and brothers had arrived, and had made her go home. Jack had a black eye.

"I'm glad Grandma makes me read the Bible," I told Grandpa as we drove into Jack's farmyard. "It's good for explaining grown-ups. The Bible people knew about weeping, and tried to let others know what to do to help." I told him about Job, and how Mr. Windermere sometimes looked to me like that.

"Ssh," Grandpa said. "Here he comes. Jack ain't no churchman in spite of that memorial thing. Don't you be mentioning Job to him."

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The farmyard had a desolate look; empty of sound it was, and bare. The cattle were gone. A great sadness hung in the air. Jack limped as he came toward us. "I have to round up some banties, Mr. Ruff," he said. "We'll put 'em in a crate. They're for Sallie. She's to get 'em before I leave. Six little beauties that'll take turns laying eggs for her breakfast. And she's to get my cat. Took a powerful liking to me, that fool cat. I ain't feeling right about leavin' her for strangers to knock about. You go look for that cat, Sallie, while your granddad and me gets the banties into the crate."

I ran off towards the barn and climbed the wall ladder into the hayloft, and there was kitty sleeping in the hay.

"You're my cat now," I told her. "I wonder what Grandma will say?" I lay down, stroking her and listening to her purr. Dark and quiet it was in the loft, with the lovely, sweet smell of hay.

Presently, Grandpa and Jack came into the barn. And there I was in the loft, listening to grownup talk again, they not knowing I was there. But it really wasn't my fault that time. And after looking down and seeing the way Jack was and the way he talked, I was too scared to move.

"Died when I was born, she did," Jack was saying. "Pa did as best he could for me. Felt about me like a feller feels for a little lickin' pup. And then—then—" A quivering, shrill note was creeping into Jack's voice, it getting higher all the time. Slowly he spoke, sighing deeply, trying not to let the stuttering get out of control. "Married her, that she-devil, Pa did. Nights reg'lar I'd pray that somehow she could be kilt; me lying awake making plans how I could do it." He spat onto the barn floor. I'd never known a spit could cause me so much fright. I cringed low in the hay.

"We lit out one day, Pa and me," Jack went on. "East, west, north, it were all the same. Women!" He made the word sound like the worst one I'd ever heard. I'd never dare tell Grandma about this. "Women! Not so much as a crust of bread. Not even water to cool a sick man's throat. 'Clear off! The likes of you is the scourge of the earth.' 'Just a night in the barn out o' the rain, missus,' Pa says. 'My son an' me, we'll chore whatever you say.' 'Tweren't no good, the dog set on us was what we got.

"We'd come north, greenhorns about how winters hit so hard, and was caught in a bad winter storm, no overcoats, numb clear through. Pa sick, a dying man by then. Not a word could he say, but somehow managed to shove one foot in front of t'other. Across country we cut, figuring to get south again. 'Missus,' I says to a woman at a farm, 'a cup of hot soup for Pa is all I ask.' She seen

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how sick he was and backed off like we had the plague. Daughter beside her roared laughin' at our rags."

Right then I nearly fell out of the loft, for Jack was crying, truly mopping tears from his cheeks with his shirtsleeve. He gave a monstrous sigh that had a sobbing sound, and went on.

"That time, when we'd no need on't, cold water was what we got. That woman had a pail of it right by the door. It sopped Pa through. Accused him of being drunk she did; he staggered some 'cos he could hardly walk. Pneumonia and death was what that mean woman gave him."

Jack pawed at his throat like it hurt. My throat was hurting, too. I was sure my hair stood on end; a crawly sensation was running up my back because, well, Jack didn't look like the same man who'd said I could have his cat.

"It's different now, Jack, lad." Grandpa's voice was low.

They were out of earshot then, and I went carefully down the ladder with kitty in my arms. I set her down, she purring and pushing against my legs while I cooled my hot eyes with water from the yard trough. And then Grandpa was calling. He had the eggs and the crate with the banties in the car.

"If we're late for lunch, Grandma'll scalp the pair of us," he said.

Jack bent down to look at me, his steely eyes all blurry and red. "Them banties now, little Sallie, and puss here, they'll have you rememberin' me for a bit?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Windermere. Thank you very much."

"There'll be some days here I'll hark back to with pleasure, Sallie, mostly 'cos of you." He kissed me on the cheek. I reached up and kissed him, too. That was the last time Grandpa and I saw Jack.

For two years after we moved to Windermere Corners, I didn't go to school at all. The year I was old enough, I got scarlet fever through going to Nobley Sunday School. And winters, when the roads were plugged with snow, I didn't get to school because of that. Grandma solved the problem by sending for lessons through the mail. Each parcel brought lessons for a week. Having two teachers, I did better than most kids my age. I liked reading best of all, and our house was full of magazines and books.

That the cemetery became a play place for me wasn't surprising for, from the first day we moved to the new house, hard and fast rules were laid down. "No going over the road to that pasture field," Grandpa said. "There's that big red bull over there. And don't climb the fence into the wheat. A farmer don't hold with folk traipsing

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about in his wheat." The fields and treed areas across the paved highway were also out of bounds, in no uncertain terms: Grandma saw to that. "Too many motor cars, and not one sign warning them to slow down," she said.

While Grandma trimmed and cared for her two graves, I played at the back of the cemetery lot. Where erosion had laid bare a tangle of tree roots and rock I made my leaf-filled secret place. Warped branches of weathered pine trees provided exciting climbing, the sticky resin on their trunks fragrant in the hot sun. Among the headstones was a good place to learn verses from the psalms. "Bible reading is easy when it's on the headstones," I told Grandma. "And some of the poetry's nice."

She laughed. So happy looking she always is in the graveyard, sort of free, thinking and talking about things that never enter her head any other place. "I know what you mean," she said. "Not a whole bookful at once. The poetry, well, some it suits and some it don't. Even so, here, everybody's the same."

I could walk safely on the grassy bank that short stretch to the graveyard down the highway. I picked flowers and grasses, and took to caring for graves that had seen no attention for a long time. Summer long, on just about all of the graves, I put glass jars filled with wildflowers, and weeded and cut down the tall grass. Through the years small groups of people moved to gravesides. We'd see them, faceless ones in all-enveloping black, eyes hidden behind veils or darkest glasses; briefly they stood, then disappeared.

"I wish a family would move here with some children of Sallie's age," Grandma said one day. "I think she's lonely. She acts old for her age, with only you and me, George, for company. I think it's partly because she reads too many grownup books."

"To me she don't look lonely." Grandpa gave the situation concentrated thought for as long as it took to fill and light his pipe, a considerable while. "Never did I see such a busy little lass. Laps up the reading. Nobody's lonely doing that."

"Those magazines of yours, and that stuff Fee brings, she'd be better off without."

"Reads her own books, too. But I've looked at a few of those, and I'd say they're the goriest of the lot. Witches roasting little kids. Giants scaring folk to death and goodlooking chaps being turned into all sorts of nasty things. What I think our little girl is after is some truth and reality about things."

It was when I started using some of Grandpa's cuss words that Grandma finally put her foot down.

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"What'll folks think! I'm sure I never used language like that. I never realized it was so difficult to bring up a girl."

Grandpa laughed. "You got used to raising boys, Addie. And as I recall, our two lads weren't above a cuss word or two. Girls aren't any different. They need to let off steam, too."

Grandma's "Humph!" says what she thinks about that. "You practice reading the psalms, Sallie," she said. "Bible reading will help keep you on the right track. We'll get rid of those books your Aunt Fee brings."

Grandpa took a long draw on his pipe and dived behind the Nobley *Enterprise*.

I never could leave well enough alone. I should have known better than to put Grandma on the spot.

"But, Grandma, why is what Aunt Fee's book-ladies do worse than the sin the Bible ladies did?"

"What!"

Behind the *Enterprise* Grandpa choked no end on his pipe.

"Well, I mean, King David and Bathsheba, they—"

"He wrote the psalms!" Grandma's knitting descended into her lap. Her eyes over the tops of her glasses were pools of boiling blue.

"And Mary and Joseph. Before they got married, she was—"

"That—that was the coming of Christ! Sallie, it's way past your bedtime. I know you, you're just getting me to talk so I won't notice the time."

"But Adam and Eve—"

"Sallie, to your bath, right now."

I don't argue when Grandma's neck gets all red. "Hellfire's lickin' at my heels," I said, and ran.

"Good grief!" I heard Grandma say. "George Ruff, don't you dare laugh. From one of your magazines that last bit was."

Grandpa managed to turn his guffaw of laughter into a noisy cough. "It's this pipe," he gasped, sputtering. "It don't draw worth a damn."

After my bath I went back to the living room, and Grandma brushed my hair. And Grandpa read a chapter of our story. While Grandma went to get my cake and milk, I told Grandpa: "I want to know about real things, Grandpa, as well as pretend. I don't feel sinful at all. I just like getting to know about things." I'd hate to have him think I'm a sinful child.

"I know, Sallie." He put his arm around me. "There's not a thing wrong with pretend. It lets us forget the weight of troublesome things for a while. And what's real and grownup, well, just about

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everybody handles that without any trouble at all. It comes a bit at a time. But you and me both, we need Grandma to set us straight. All you have to do is listen to Grandma and you'll never go far wrong."

In the palm of his hand my heart was, and warm it was there. The palm of Grandma's hand, I knew, was capable of warming me elsewhere. But, lying in bed, my last thought before sleep came was of the gentle caress of her fingers as she had brushed my hair.

My scarlet fever year, that whole summer I had so much free time and began to help Grandma with the graves.

"Why doesn't Mr. Windermere put a stone on Rosalie's grave?" I asked one day. "It looks so bare."

"I suppose he might have if he hadn't sold the farm and moved away. Perhaps it's no easy thing for him to get back here from wherever it is he's gone."

"Uncle Don says it's because he's too mean."

"Oh, Uncle Don is inclined to be a bit hard on Jack. His being an insurance investigator makes him critical of people and things they do. Folk can't always do as other people think they should."

We stood staring at the plain mound.

"Is the baby in there, too, Grandma? What was its name? Was it a boy or girl baby?"

"It didn't have a name. A little girl it was, stillborn. That means it didn't breathe at all. Tiny enough it was to share the space with the mother in there."

"It should really have had a name, Grandma. Oh, it really should."

"I don't suppose anyone thought there was that need, not with things as they were."

"Grandma, the baby should have a name like everybody. What will Mr. Windermere do when he comes to put up the stone and no name to put there for it?"

"It'll be all right, you'll see."

On that grave I put two glass jars, and kept them filled with flowers right through all the summer. It was also that same year, but a short time later, that I gave the baby a name.

"I've called the baby Genevieve," I told Grandma one day coming in from the cemetery.

"Whyever that, Sallie?" She gave Grandpa a funny look.

"Because it was the only one suitable," I said.

Grandpa was looking surprised, too. He had his "sizing up" look

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going. "Hmm," he said. "That feller that's building a house a piece up the road—name's Russ Barr—says they got three kids, two boys, and a girl just about Sallie's age." By then he was giving Grandma the it'll-be-all-right-after-a-while look. It had got to be like this between them at the time of the scarlet fever, they worrying about me. I'd said a lot of silly things, you see. I was very sick, I suppose.

As I went off to get washed, I heard Grandma say, "Where d'you suppose she got that name? Never heard that friend of Rosalie's called anything but Gennie, I'd swear."

I'd forgotten to say that it was a name I'd seen on a headstone at a far side of the slope where Grandma never went. I didn't think about it any more because I was so anxious to have Grandpa tell me all about the new family that was moving in.

It was very exciting when the Barr family arrived. The first day they came I met Wendy, and at once she and I were best friends. Grandma and Grandpa were delighted. Together, Wendy and I shared the secret hideout, and tended the graves together, too.

And then Wendy and I joined the Girl Guides. With all there was to do—Girl Guide meetings and school homework and going to camp in the summers—we became less familiar with the cemetery, paying little attention beyond our family plot or occasional visits to our secret place. Aware as we were of the many new headstones being put up throughout the graveyard as years went by, there was no time for us to pay any close attention to them. I asked Grandma one day about the new headstones.

"Oh, Sallie," she said. "I'm afraid I haven't had time to look at them, either. What with Chapter and church work I just get time to tend our own graves for a few minutes on a Sunday."

"And Jack Windermere, after all these years, hasn't yet put up a stone for Rosalie and little Genevieve."

"Nobody's seen hide nor hair of Jack since he left here. If he did come back, he'd not bother to visit anybody in Nobley. In Knoxley or Indian Ridge he could live for years, and who of us would know? Jack was a very secretive fellow."

The old Jack Windermere nobody ever did see again. I think he deliberately saw to that, the whole idea of his moving away being to make himself over, getting a completely fresh start, wishing the past forgotten. And time went by and Jack was, more or less, forgotten.

And then one Sunday, when Uncle Don and Aunt Fee came as usual for the day, Uncle Don said, "Dad, you'd never guess who I saw this week: Jack Windermere!"

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"No kidding! Poor Jack. How's he doing these days?"

"No need to say 'poor Jack.' For a start you'd never recognize him if you met him face to face on the street. It was in the elevator of our office building that I ran into him; me blankly staring at a total stranger when he said hello to me. To say he's put on weight is putting it mildly. On top of that he has a beard, and wears his hair in that style the young chaps go for. Dressed like a gentleman, too; silk shirt and a suit I wish I could afford. Showed me his new Cadillac when he got out to the parking lot."

"I'll be hanged! Where's he living these days?"

"When I asked, he said only that he moves around a lot. If he likes a place he stays for a while. To put it his way: 'Don, I got a moving ailment inside of me that there's no cure for.' "

"Did he say if he'd been back this way?"

"No. It wasn't me he came to the office to see, so we didn't talk for long."

That was the year before Wendy and I were twelve. And then came the year and day of my twelfth birthday. Sunday it was again, and Wendy came back with us to our house from church. Uncle Don and Aunt Fee were there, too, for my birthday party.

"You have to go hide, Sallie," Wendy said, laughing, "while we set the table for a surprise."

"That bunch of late roses I cut this morning, Sallie," Grandma said, "you could take them over to the cemetery. I was planning to go over with them later."

"Oh, yes, Grandma. And I'll take a quick look at our hideout, Wendy. I haven't been there in a donkey's age."

"Don't stay too long, dear," Grandma said. "Dinner will be ready in less than an hour."

After putting the roses on Dad Elwood's and Mom Nell's graves I wandered about, looking at all the new headstones that had gone up, many of them elaborate, costly, too. And after a while I began to think that something seemed very strange. How could it be? I went back to check to make sure I hadn't made a mistake. And then I was reminded how I came to name Rosalie's baby Genevieve, so long ago, the name I'd selected from a particular headstone seeming to be the only one suitable at the time. I went over to the far side of the cemetery and checked it, too. Yes, there was the Windermere name. And, as I stood there, my mind working on all the things that had been done and said over the years, only then did I connect the name there, Genevieve, with Gennie Briggs! Well! It was quite beyond me. I'd have to ask Grandma about-all that.

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I was so busy looking at the many new headstones that I never did get to the secret place.

When I got back home, Aunt Fee and Wendy had decorated the table with flowers. So lovely it was, it quite took my breath away. And there was the excitement of opening my birthday gifts. And then we were all talking and laughing, and helping Grandma get food on the pretty table. It was when Grandpa was carving the roast, and everybody was sort of quiet for a change, that Wendy said: "Sallie, how did you find our secret place? Did that last rainstorm damage anything?"

"Oh, I never got that far. And I just remembered. Grandma, something at the cemetery seemed very strange, well, odd you might say."

"Oh? Don't tell me Jack Windermere finally put a memorial stone up for Rosalie?"

"No. But there are four other new headstones, all with Jack Windermere's name on them, as well as the one way back that I got the name for Rosalie's baby from."

"Five! All Jack Windermere?" Grandpa, carving knife in hand, stared at me over the top of his glasses.

"'Beloved wife of Jack Windermere,' the inscriptions said. All five of them." I was suddenly feeling silly because of the way everyone was staring at me. Surely they thought I was making it up.

"Er—could you have mis-read, Sallie, love?" Grandma said, after a long pause.

I thought carefully, and then remembered that I'd gone back, checking to make sure. "All from different, other places," I said, "some not too far away. And not one near the other in the cemetery. Now I think about it, I believe they were those plots that Rosalie showed us one day, those ones she bought, Grandma, remember."

"Any plots in the cemetery that Rosalie owned Jack would have fallen heir to," Uncle Don said. "Dad, every one would have had separate deed, just like any other piece of real estate. Jack could have sold them, sure, and he could have—could have—Angel, you sure every one of those stones said Windermere?"

"I checked them a second time, Uncle Don, because it did seem a bit queer."

It was Grandma's good dinner that got the party going again. Even so, Uncle Don sat rather quietly for him, tugging at his ear now and then. And then he said:

"That Windermere name came up just this week at the office. Hadn't connected it until now with our Jack Windermere. One of

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our guys asked me to look at a claim. Haven't had time to get to it yet. Dad, you and me, we'll take a walk yonder, after a while."

The afternoon went by so fast I could hardly believe. At supper I said, "Uncle Don, did you see Wendy's and my pumpkins at the bottom of the garden?"

"Sure did, Angel Face. I bet the two of you will cop first prize at the fair. You two should stick to that kind of gardening now."

What a big surprise it was when, a few days later, Uncle Don came up, and it was not even Saturday or Sunday. Some strangers in business suits were with him. And after a while the police came, and some men who were detectives. Following them came men in overalls, with spades. Tall boarding was put up about all of the Windermere graves.

From our secret place Wendy and I watched, to see what was happening to our glass jars. "They'll ruin everything," Wendy said. "Just look at the mess they've made! All our work for nothing."

It was when Uncle Don got back from the city, after talking to Jack Windermere in jail, that all the gaps were filled in. Grandma was chewing on her apron as she and Grandpa listened. They'd all forgotten about me, so I sat quite still and heard everything.

"Jack has signed a full confession," Uncle Don said. "He poisoned six wives including Rosalie, Ned and Maggie, too. Gennie Briggs was one. And there were those girls who'd given Gennie some competition, whose families had also moved away. He had hinted that he would put the headstones up, thinking that should deter their families from making a move that way. He hadn't bargained for their doing it themselves when they saw that nothing had been done. And, of course, each one had the Windermere name. None knew any of the others, since they all lived in different communities. Never were they in the cemetery at the same time. Undertakers and monument companies and ministers had no connection either. The digging of the graves Jack contracted with the undertaker, since he was the one who could produce deeds for the plots."

"But why?" Grandpa asked. "Did Jack give you any reason for his doing all this?"

"He told me a story about a woman who threw water on his dad, and a girl who laughed at them. Ten years old Jack was at the time. Said he'd told you about that. Well, he spent years looking for that farmhouse where it happened, once he was grown. And he finally found it, the place where those two women were. The girl's name was Rosalie."

"My God!" Grandpa put a shaking hand over his eyes.

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Grandma's apron was all the way over her head.

Uncle Don went on: "Jack told me about all the years he and his dad had been starving to death, it being almost impossible for them to earn enough to buy their food. They'd no idea how to find help. Neither of them could read or write. Wandering about meant that Jack never went to school. Occasionally they helped in the harvests, but mostly they fished, and sometimes stole their food.

"And then, all at once for Jack, after he married Rosalie, it became so easy to get more money than he'd ever dreamed of having. He couldn't stop, he said. To put it the way he did: 'Don, from then on I knew I'd be doing the same thing for the rest of my life. That terrible hating got going inside me. It made me laugh every time I used up one of Rosalie's burial plots. Revenge took over. It was a monster I couldn't stop. But Rosalie, well, she got me in the end, you see.'

"Having the wives buried in Nobley Cemetery, in Rosalie's own plots, appealed to his grim sense of humor, because it was Rosalie he was still getting even with throughout. Looked like Ned's Jinx Place got Jack in the end, but really, it was Rosalie's burial plots that were his undoing."

When Uncle Don stopped talking, we all sat there, not saying a word. It was sort of like being frozen.

Later, when all the strangers and police and newspaper people were gone, we began to thaw out and get back to normal.

"Will we leave Windermere Corners now, Grandma?" I asked.

"Leave! I should say not. More reason to stay than there ever has been. So many families here have need of us. Grandpa, you and me, the three of us started a very special place."

Right she was about that, for families with children are here now, and there is talk of building a new school. A small church for burial services there is already, near the spot where Jack donated the land. The cairn he put up for his dad is still there, and to strangers the inscription suggests that a good man was founder of Windermere Corners, as I think Jack's dad truly was, and as Jack himself would have liked to have been.

Memory of Jack, to most, is vague. And few remember that Nobley Cemetery was once Ned Haskins's Jinx Place. Newspapers featuring our community, describing it as a natural beauty spot, give its official name as Windermere Corners.

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FICTION



The Enjoyment of an Artist

by Isak Romun

Our music critic should have reviewed the Lesirrek concert and handled the interview. He was only a part-time music critic, however. In the other part of his time he ran a music store. And that night there was a sale. So, my editor, who remembered that I had a respectable record collection and hoped I knew my way around a fugue, dropped the assignment on me.

Beyond the excitement of Frederic Lesirrek's appearance in Paulsburg, there was to be the excitement of discovery. The second

Illustration by Arthur George

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half of the French pianist's program was to be given over to works by one of those "lost" composers. This was Etienne Sobel, an individual hidden so effectively from the glare of history that I had never heard of him, much less heard anything by him.

The concert promised to be stimulating. As it turned out, it was—though that was due less to the music played than to the music that wasn't.

The Paulsburg Academy for the Performing Arts was old without the dignity of age, like a drunken relative you love but find it hard to respect. The place had a dreariness not even the most innovative lighting could dispel. Its programming was dreary, too. The week before, Victor Herbert's *Natoma* had been put on by a company the critics simply labeled terrible. Before that, there was Josef Bayer's ballet, *Die Puppenfee,* a work of such improbable dullness that it is seldom staged nowadays even in Austria, the composer's homeland.

On the way in, I met Kinseca, the academy's director, two hundred pounds of loose flesh encased in a five-five frame and a custom tux that did nothing to hide the bulges. He bared his big white teeth at me in a smile with as much warmth as yesterday's oatmeal.

"Going to put us on the front page?" he asked.

"Not the front page; a nice piece in Sunday's entertainment section, though."

"We can use any help," he said absently, leveling his smile at the customers streaming through the lobby. "A good house. If every night were like tonight, the academy might end up in the black now and then."

"Get yourself a better program manager."

"*I* do all the programming," he said.

"Get yourself a PR man then; and more publicity. Anything that gets you close to the front page."

He put his hand up to his chin and began to pluck at it. A bell rang. I waved goodbye and left him standing in the now-deserted lobby, hand still at his chin, a thoughtful look on his face.

Lesirrek was great. He seemed to slide magically and altogether too swiftly through the first half of the concert. He opened with Bach and moved effortlessly through Mendelssohn and Mozart to arrive at a Chopin group brought to a stunning close with the *Ballade in G Minor.*

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The lights went up for the intermission, but the audience refused to let Lesirrek off the stage. While the concertgoers applauded, I went backstage to get a leg up on my interview.

I saw Jacques Martinal there. He was a gray, ancient man, unbent by age and with energy in his slender frame. His bright brown eyes were alert, restless. He seemed preoccupied. I reflected that this was perhaps natural among single-client managers of the Martinal stripe—those who are more than managers, combining the role of businessman with those of mother hen and father confessor.

I had heard of Martinal. He wasn't always the fussy aesthete he appeared to be that night. During the war he was in the Resistance, a tough nut who went about his work without pleasure, without passion, without regret. He had destroyed enough German convoys to earn a Croix de Guerre from his grateful nation.

Right now he was too busy watching his charge to give me more than an annoyed nod when I introduced myself. ("Monahan, Paulsburg *Advance-Indicator*.") Lesirrek came off stage then, but looked expectantly back to where he had stood. Martinal went over to the pianist and laid a finger on his arm. They talked. I knew just enough French to get the gist of what they were saying.

"That's enough, Frederic."

Lesirrek turned a flushed face. "Please, *maman,* just one more." He gently disengaged himself.

"No encores!"

"All right, all right." Lesirrek laughed and went onstage.

"The roar of the crowd," I said. "He's human like the rest of us."

"Mr. Monahan," Martinal hissed, "Frederic Lesirrek is brilliant in the extreme, devoted to his art to the point of mania. He is capable of being a demon or a saint, but he is quite incapable of ever being 'like the rest of us.'"

If I'd intended answering *that,* I was saved the trouble by the reappearance of Lesirrek, diminishing applause behind him. To me, he looked neither demonic nor saintly.

Introductions were underway and Lesirrek had asked my first name (I admitted reluctantly to Oscar) when we heard a sound, a muffled sound—bumph!—a tired groaning, an explosion of contained dimensions, and onstage the piano collapsed into broken wood, disarrayed keys, and quivering wires.

Several things happened then. Martinal crossed himself. Lesirrek muttered in French and English. Kinseca, who had appeared out of nowhere, ran between the stage and the wings. The audience

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gasped collectively but, remarkably, kept their seats. I hurried to the nearest telephone.

I was back on a news beat.

It took me moments to pass on the details of the concert and its exploding piano to the rewrite desk. Then I made arrangements for a nightside reporter and photographer to come over to the academy and get the rest of the story. I intended to get my interview with Lesirrek.

As it developed, I didn't. Not as I planned, anyway.

To start with, after answering some questions for the police and negotiating with Kinseca, Martinal had spirited the distraught Lesirrek from the hall. There would be no second half of the concert. No Etienne Sobel. Kinseca was onstage announcing that Monsieur Lesirrek would return in two months' time and all tickets for tonight's concert would be honored for the future one and so on.

When the academy director came offstage, I got the name of the hotel where the musician and his manager were staying. I went over there.

Martinal opened the door and said, "Yes?" One of his eyebrows formed a question mark lying on its side. I was among the forgotten.

"Monahan, Mr. Martinal. Of the *Advance-Indicator*. The interview?"

"Oh, yes." He stood aside and I entered what appeared to be a sitting room. "Now, Mr. Monahan, all you can say about what happened tonight is that it is the work of some local crank of whose identity the police have an idea."

"I guess that's all I could've said, anyway. Isn't it?"

He took a small impatient breath and said, "Yes."

"Okay, so bring on Lesirrek."

Martinal sat down in a stuffed chair, a pattern of *fleurs-de-lis* in its fabric. "He is, in a manner of speaking, already *on*. He is here in my person."

"In a manner of speaking, that's not exactly what I had in mind."

"That is the only way this interview will work. Frederic is asleep, sedated." He gestured vaguely toward a door behind which I guessed was a bedroom. "Even without the circumstance of sleep, he would be in no condition to talk to you. He is much too shaken up. And tomorrow we travel."

I must have looked uncertain, for he went on, "Come, Mr. Monahan, we have already been asked the very same questions you will ask and we will give the same answers we have given before."

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" 'We'? You talk as if he's here."

"That should tell you the quality of the interview will be no different than if he were."

I thought about going back to my editor empty-handed. "All right," I said, "I'll go along."

Martinal smiled, motioned me to a chair. "I have a very nice wine here. I won't burden you with its pedigree. Take my word, it's very nice. A glass?"

I indicated a small one, got my notebook out, and settled into the chair, hoping my first question would be one Martinal had never heard.

After about an hour and three more small glasses of wine, I had all I needed for my article.

"Anything else?" Martinal asked. "Photographs? I have a folder."

"Abe Slaughter, our photographer, caught Mr. Lesirrek at rehearsal earlier."

"I forgot. Well, again, anything else?"

"That explosion. The way you warded off questions about it as soon as I got here makes me think you know more."

"If I could answer questions so my responses would not see print . . . "

"It's called 'off the record' and I'm agreeable." I put away my notebook to reassure Martinal.

"Very well. Before tonight, there have been letters. Threatening letters."

"Against Lesirrek?"

"Not against his person, as such. Only if he did something."

Now the night's events made some sense. "Play the music of Sobel?"

Martinal nodded.

"How about the police?"

"The police know as much as they have to know."

"Who is Sobel?"

Martinal fell back in his chair, tented his fingers, and looked musingly at the ceiling.

"Etienne Marie Louis Jean-Baptiste Sobel. Born in London, September 10th, 1752. His parents were at odds with some royal personage, it seems, and had fled France. Time and a softening of attitudes took them back in 1763.

"Etienne had shown marked musical abilities in England. His

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first teacher was his father, a court violinist. But the son favored the keyboard. In France his gifts flowered. In the year of his return, the eleven-year-old Sobel played a duet with the seven-year-old Mozart who was visiting Paris.

"When Mozart left, young Sobel dominated a sub-stratum of musical Paris for a number of years. He composed easily and continually. His work is good, solidly structured. It is not endowed with that mark of transcendent genius Mozart brought to *his* compositions, but it is unworthy of the neglect it has suffered."

Then, as if puzzled, Martinal exclaimed, "I can't imagine what anyone could have against Sobel or his music."

"Maybe he had enemies whose descendants have long memories."

"Oh, he had enemies enough. The Revolution had caught up with Sobel. His enemies were of the worst kind—and the most dangerous: Robespierre and his fanatical following. Not that Sobel did anything to Robespierre, simply that he was a follower of Danton, Robespierre's political rival. Sobel fell with his idol. Between June 12th and July 28th in 1794, the day of Robespierre's downfall, no fewer than 1,825 persons perished on the Paris guillotine. Danton was first. Etienne Sobel followed sometime during that forty-six-day bloodbath."

"How did Lesirrek come across Sobel's music?"

"In a Christian Brothers school not far from Paris. Frederic's youngest brother, Richard, attends the school. The librarian, Frére Cajetan, had Richard contact Frederic about a bundle of foolscap manuscripts found in the attic of the old school building. Frederic and I drove there one weekend, examined the manuscripts, and, *voilà,* Sobel was reborn.

"We scheduled Sobel in several of our concerts, but each time an anonymous threat caused us to substitute at the last moment. For the Paulsburg concert, Frederic was insistent: *he would play Sobel.* Who could suspect Frederic to be in danger *here?"*

Martinal raised himself from his chair and went to a sideboard. "Do you know French?" he asked.

"A little, picked up during the war. I could make out what you and Lesirrek said tonight. I can't handle anything harder."

Martinal withdrew four stapled pages from an attaché case and handed them to me. "While awaiting execution, Sobel wrote a kind of testament. You are holding a typewritten transcript of his handwritten orginal. The testament's main purpose was to provide instructions for the disposition of the manuscripts that Sobel, fearing arrest, had previously entrusted to a colleague. The colleague's

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name was Lemensonge, probably a *nom de guerre*. Beyond the instructions, there is a good deal of information about Sobel, much of which I've already told you."

"Okay to take this?" I held up the testament.

"Why not? The subject of Sobel was to figure in the interview. But remember, you can't launch off from the testament to speculate on this other business, the business of the threats and the exploding piano. I don't want to encourage a madman to further excess."

"I know. One thing, though. Will Lesirrek play Sobel when he returns?"

"He will not!" Martinal said stiffly. "I have his promise. Sobel will have to await another discoverer."

He paused a moment, then asked, "Do you have everything you need?"

"I think so."

"Good, then shall we—" Martinal picked up the wine bottle, now empty. "I can send down for another, or perhaps you'd rather leave."

I didn't use the testament for my writeup. But I did want to know what it said. I sent it to a translator. A week or so later, it came back. I opened the envelope, saw what was inside, but didn't read it. I put the envelope and its contents aside for later attention.

I didn't look at the testament for a number of weeks. About the time Lesirrek was due back for his makeup concert, I felt I'd better brush up on the events of that night two months before. Because I had covered the original concert, I got the makeup as well.

As a starter, I pulled the transcript and its translation out of their envelope and read through the latter. The testament was divided into three parts: Sobel's early life before returning to France, his success as a musical prodigy, and his part in the Revolution including his condemnation by the Revolutionary Tribunal.

The first two parts told me generally what Martinal had related.

The third part disclosed that Sobel's dedication to the Revolution had continued until the time of Danton's execution. The testament told how the musician, foreseeing his own end and concerned that his contributions would die with him, had begun collecting his compositions. These he bundled up and entrusted to Lemensonge, who was not under the unwelcome scrutiny of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety.

Shortly afterwards, according to the testament, Sobel was arrested and taken to the Conciergerie, a prison, where he remained,

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except for his trial, until that final trip to Madame. The account was filled with details of arrangements for smuggling the testament out of the prison, the secrecy of its writing, the bribing of a guard to secure postage for the document when it should be concluded.

I put down the translation and picked up the transcript. Now that I had the contents of the narrative in mind, I wondered whether I could make my way through the French. Though I could make out some words, mostly nouns (*garçon, maison, timbre-poste,* and *prisonnier* were a few), the attempt was, on the whole, a waste of time. It had been a long time since World War II.

I gave up, put aside the transcript, and went back to the translation. My first reading had been hurried; now I would study the testament.

I got to the Academy late. The exploding piano had done nothing to scare off business—might even have promoted it. The place was packed and there was an SRO sign outside the ticket office.

The first half of the program was over and Lesirrek had launched the second with the motoric *Mouvements Perpetuels* of Francis Poulenc. I didn't go to my seat; some SRO ticket was probably in it anyway. Instead, I went backstage. I wanted to see Jacques Martinal.

He was standing in the same spot he had been in the last time Lesirrek was onstage in Paulsburg. Except this time the little manager seemed more relaxed, as though he were enjoying Poulenc's lithe certainties. I went up behind him and touched his elbow. He turned.

"Mr. Monahan, what brings you back here?"

"I want to talk about Sobel."

"I can tell you nothing beyond what's in the testament."

"Okay, let's change the subject. Have you ever heard Fritz Kreisler's *Pavane in the Style of Couperin?*"

"You haven't really changed the subject at all, have you?" He smiled and wagged his head. "We can talk in Frederic's dressing room."

Seated in the dressing room, Martinal began, "You must understand Frederic Lesirrek. His powers go beyond the interpretive. There was a period when he stopped performing."

I consulted my notebook. "He took off three years and devoted himself to composition."

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"Specifically, a piano concerto."

"Which was never performed."

"The last pianist-composer was Rachmaninoff as far as modern concertgoers and conductors are concerned."

"So, to get back at a musical world that had rejected him, he composed music with the intention of attributing it to another, just as Kreisler did. But Lesirrek outdid Kreisler; your Frederic not only composed the music but composed Sobel as well."

"It was a joke, *ein musikalischer Spass,* as Mozart would have said; a musical joke, a means of chiding those who would accept Lesirrek the composer in counterfeit but not in actuality. Frederic's brother planted the compositions and the testament at the school, then arranged somehow for Brother Cajetan to discover them. We were to promote Sobel and, when he showed signs of becoming established, admit the hoax in the same cheerful spirit in which Kreisler admitted his."

I leaned toward Martinal. "That doesn't explain the threatening letters to Lesirrek. Nor does it explain the exploding piano."

"We've circumvented the possibility of violence. Frederic and I have agreed to decently bury Etienne Sobel."

"There's still a mystery here. Somewhere out there, there's a nut roaming loose. Don't you want to get to the bottom of this thing?"

Martinal shifted in his chair, and when he spoke, I sensed irritation in his voice. "Let the old cat die, Mr. Monahan." Then he asked, "How did you find us out?"

"Sobel—a real, honest-to-God eighteenth century Sobel—couldn't have written that testament. And if the testament was a fraud, then probably its supposed author was, too. If he wasn't, there was precious little external evidence to suggest his existence. I checked some heavy authorities and none mentions Sobel. I read Niemtschek's biography of Mozart. No mention of Etienne. I came to the conclusion: Sobel doesn't exist except as Lesirrek's invention."

"And mine, I wrote the testament." He laughed softly. "What specifically put you on to us?"

"That stamp—*timbre-poste* in French—the stamp Sobel was supposed to have used to pay the testament's postage. It couldn't have existed in 1794. The first French postage stamp dates from 1849."

"Commendable. What else?"

"That's not enough?"

"You missed something. In Great Britain, the Calendar Act for the adoption of the Gregorian calendar was passed in 1750. The day following the second of September in 1752 was to be accounted

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the fourteenth day of that month."

"Am I dense tonight? So?"

"In 1752 in Great Britain the dates three through thirteen September were not used."

I flipped some pages in my notebook till I found what I wanted. "And Sobel was 'born' in London, according to the testament, on the tenth of September, a date that didn't exist in the England of 1752. Why do I get the idea *you knew errors were in the testament?"*

"Because I put them there."

"Why?"

"Because we were not out to play God indefinitely. I didn't want the masquerade to go on forever, but felt our voluntary confession would be awkward. Therefore, the testament contained the seeds of our exposure."

"Was this Lesirrek's idea?"

"I composed the testament; Frederic, the music."

"So, Sobel's music will never be heard," I said, maybe sadly; I like a joke as much as anyone.

"That's not quite the case!"

This was a new voice. The dressing room door had been quietly opened on my last statement. In its frame stood Kinseca. He didn't look angry, but he wasn't exactly happy either. Beyond him, we heard piano playing. It was distant, but I recognized it wasn't Poulenc. It wasn't Tchaikovsky either, which was to follow the Poulenc.

"Sobel!" I watched the color in Martinal's face drain away. He rushed out the door headed in the direction of the stage.

I followed.

Martinal halted at his usual station: in the wings looking out upon the stage. His figure went limp. He held onto a nearby curtain rope. I think if he hadn't, he would have fallen. His eyes, usually bright, arrogant, dominating those upon whom they rested, seemed to flicker and go out.

I listened to the music, gripped by it. Not because of its merit, it sounded like indifferent Mozart or average Stamitz, but because of my secret knowledge. I was listening to what sounded eerily like authentic eighteenth century music, a true composition in music's classical mold.

As the work neared its end, I moved closer to Martinal and whispered, "His secret is safe with me."

The music stopped and a flow of tempestuous clapping eddied up to and lapped over the stage. Martinal turned his tired eyes upon

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me and whispered back, "But, Mr. Monahan, is *he* safe with his secret?"

Then Lesirrek was off the stage after his first bows. I asked him, "A statement, Mr. Lesirrek. In your opinion what is Etienne Sobel's place among composers of his period?"

The pianist stared at me. "Who are you, sir?"

Martinal explained. "Frederic, you've met Mr. Monahan—briefly. Remember, of the paper here in Paulsburg?"

"And who is Frederic?"

The pianist didn't wait for an answer. Beyond us the applause was too appealing, too insistent. He returned to the stage.

When he came back, I asked, "Could I have your name, sir?"

"Tonight all Paris knows my name."

And Etienne Sobel went out to take another bow.

Martinal was speaking.

"I'm afraid he wears Sobel as someone wears a mask. A mask he cannot now get off." The manager lapsed into silence.

We were in the hotel suite of the two Frenchmen, the same suite they had occupied months ago. The pianist was not there. He was in a private room at St. Scholastica's. Martinal had spent the evening arranging for his client's admission to the hospital, for the later trip home to France, for the cancellation of Lesirrek's remaining American concerts. Now, Martinal, exhausted, his nerves ragged, seemed reluctant to let me go. Swallowed up in an overstuffed brocade chair with a yew-tree design, he talked disconnectedly of Lesirrek and the pianist's career. I responded in the appropriate places, careful not to crowd the old man's unwinding process. Martinal's silence, though, told me that now might be one of those moments when I should say something.

"A mask. That's interesting. Let's see." I put on my portentous look and intoned, " 'For the enjoyment of an artist the mask must be to some extent molded on the face. What he makes outside him must correspond to something inside him; he can only make his effects out of the materials of his soul.' "

"That says it, Mr. Monahan."

"I didn't, though. I wish I had. Chesterton wrote those words, probably before I was born."

"Are you still curious about the threats? The demolished piano?"

I shook my head.

He went on. "There were periods of transference before. But not

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like tonight. I felt—I knew—that if he ever performed Sobel to an appreciative, applauding audience, it would drive him over the edge, into the deep pit of his own imagination. The danger of fathering a fantasy is adopting a child."

"So you'd do anything to discourage Lesirrek. Send him threatening letters. Take a chance on blowing up his piano during intermission. Carefully blowing it up though, just enough to make it inoperable and not hurt anyone unless that person were close to it—that's why you didn't want Lesirrek to play encores! You could manage the explosion. The Resistance gave you all the expertise you needed."

"I did all those things. For nothing."

"Where do you go from here?"

"I will take Frederic or Etienne—I'm afraid the latter—back to France. By whatever name, he is my client."

"Just thought of this. How did you explain the letters and the exploding piano to him?"

"I don't follow you."

"He must have suspected you. He knew Sobel wasn't real."

"He didn't."

"Didn't? Did you say *didn't?*"

"He didn't," Martinal repeated.

I thought about that, then said, "He convinced himself early on that Sobel *was* real. Before he convinced himself that *he* was Sobel."

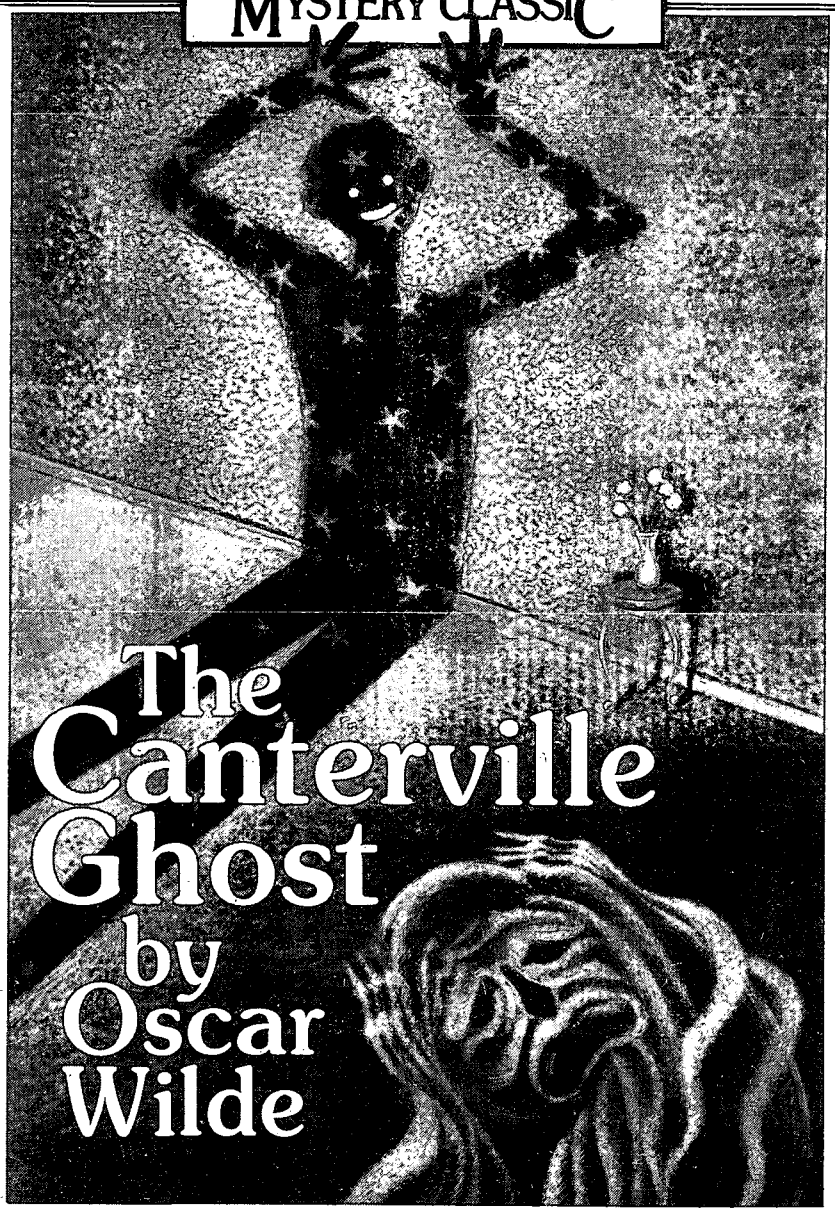
"Yes, that's it."

Etienne Sobel is back in Paris now in a small, exclusive nursing home. I saw the musician-composer there when I was on an overseas trip. He is happy. Every day he can be found in his room, spacious for a place of that sort and rather like a candlelit study, playing the piano, putting new music onto notepaper, looking forward to great triumphs.

Frederic Lesirrek? I don't know what in the world became of him. He disappeared from the face of the earth.

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MYSTERY CLASSIC



The Canterville Ghost

by Oscar Wilde

Illustration by Mark Fresh

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When Mr. Hiram B. Otis, the American minister, bought Canterville Chase, everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted. Indeed, Lord Canterville himself, who was a man of the most punctilious honor, had felt it his duty to mention the fact to Mr. Otis, when they came to discuss terms.

"We have not cared to live in the place ourselves," said Lord Canterville, "since my grand-aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Bolton, was frightened into a fit, from which she never really recovered, by two skeleton hands being placed on her shoulders as she was dressing for dinner, and I feel bound to tell you, Mr. Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Reverend Augustus Dampier, who is a fellow of King's College, Cambridge. After the unfortunate accident to the duchess, none of our younger servants would stay with us, and Lady Canterville often got very little sleep at night, in consequence of the mysterious noises that came from the corridor and the library."

"My lord," answered the minister, "I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; and with all our spry young fellows painting the Old World red, and carrying off your best actresses and prima donnas, I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show."

"I fear that the ghost exists," said Lord Canterville, smiling, "though it may have resisted the overtures of your enterprising impresarios. It has been well known for three centuries, since 1584, in fact, and always makes its appearance before the death of any member of our family."

"Well, so does the family doctor for that matter, Lord Canterville. But there is no such thing, sir, as a ghost, and I guess the laws of nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy."

"You are certainly very natural in America," answered Lord Canterville, who did not quite understand Mr. Otis's last observation, "and if you don't mind a ghost in the house, it is all right. Only you must remember I warned you."

A few weeks after this, the purchase was completed, and at the close of the season the minister and his family went down to Canterville Chase. Mrs. Otis, who, as Miss Lucretia R. Tappan, of West 53rd Street, had been a celebrated New York belle, was now a very handsome middle-aged woman, with fine eyes, and a superb profile.

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Many American ladies on leaving their native land adopt an appearance of chronic ill health, under the impression that it is a form of European refinement, but Mrs. Otis had never fallen into this error. She had a magnificent constitution, and a really wonderful amount of animal spirits. Indeed, in many respects, she was quite English, and was an excellent example of the fact that we have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language. Her eldest son, christened Washington by his parents in a moment of patriotism, which he never ceased to regret, was a fairhaired, rather goodlooking young man, who had qualified himself for American diplomacy by leading the German at the Newport Casino for three successive seasons, and even in London was well known as an excellent dancer. Gardenias and the peerage were his only weaknesses. Otherwise he was extremely sensible. Miss Virginia E. Otis was a little girl of fifteen, lithe, and lovely as a fawn, and with a fine freedom in her large blue eyes. She was a wonderful amazon, and had once raced old Lord Bilton on her pony twice round the park, winning by a length and a half, just in front of Achilles' statue, to the huge delight of the young Duke of Cheshire, who proposed to her on the spot, and was sent back to Eton that very night by his guardians, in floods of tears. After Virginia came the twins, who were usually called The Stars and Stripes, as they were always getting swished. They were delightful boys, and with the exception of the worthy minister the only true republicans of the family.

As Canterville Chase is seven miles from Ascot, the nearest railway station, Mr. Otis had telegraphed for a waggonette to meet them, and they started on their drive in high spirits. It was a lovely July evening, and the air was delicate with the scent of the pine-woods. Now and then they heard a wood pigeon brooding over its own sweet voice, or saw, deep in the rustling fern, the burnished breast of the pheasant. Little squirrels peered at them from the beech trees as they went by, and the rabbits scudded away through the brushwood and over the mossy knolls, with their tails in the air. As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, however, the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, a great flight of rooks passed silently over their heads, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen.

Standing on the steps to receive them was an old woman, neatly dressed in black silk, with a white cap and apron. This was Mrs. Umney, the housekeeper, whom Mrs. Otis, at Lady Canterville's

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earnest request, had consented to keep on in her former position. She made them each a low curtsey as they alighted, and said in a quaint, old-fashioned manner, "I bid you welcome to Canterville Chase." Following her, they passed through the fine Tudor hall into the library, a long, low room, panelled in black oak, at the end of which was a large stained-glass window. Here they found tea laid out for them, and, after taking off their wraps, they sat down and began to look round, while Mrs. Umney waited on them.

Suddenly Mrs. Otis caught sight of a dull red stain on the floor just by the fireplace and, quite unconscious of what it really signified, said to Mrs. Umney, "I am afraid something has been spilt there."

"Yes, madam," replied the old housekeeper in a low voice, "blood has been spilt on that spot."

"How horrid," cried Mrs. Otis, "I don't at all care for bloodstains in a sitting room. It must be removed at once."

The old woman smiled, and answered in the same low, mysterious voice, "It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her own husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon survived her nine years, and disappeared suddenly under very mysterious circumstances. His body has never been discovered, but his guilty spirit still haunts the Chase. The bloodstain has been much admired by tourists and others, and cannot be removed."

"That is all nonsense," cried Washington Otis; "Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time," and before the terrified housekeeper could interfere he had fallen upon his knees, and was rapidly scouring the floor with a small stick of what looked like a black cosmetic. In a few moments no trace of the bloodstain could be seen.

"I knew Pinkerton would do it," he exclaimed triumphantly, as he looked round at his admiring family; but no sooner had he said these words than a terrible flash of lightning lit up the somber room, and a fearful peal of thunder made them all start to their feet, and Mrs. Umney fainted.

"What a *monstrous* climate!" said the American minister calmly, as he lit a long cheroot. "I guess the old country is so overpopulated that they have not enough decent weather for everybody. I have always been of opinion that emigration is the only thing for England."

"My dear Hiram," cried Mrs. Otis, "what can we do with a woman who faints?"

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"Charge it to her like breakages," answered the minister; "she won't faint after that"; and in a few moments Mrs. Umney certainly came to. There was no doubt, however, that she was extremely upset, and she sternly warned Mr. Otis to beware of some trouble coming to the house.

"I have seen things with my own eyes, sir," she said, "that would make any Christian's hair stand on end, and many and many a night I have not closed my eyes in sleep for the awful things that are done here." Mr. Otis, however, and his wife warmly assured the honest soul that they were not afraid of ghosts, and, after invoking the blessings of Providence on her new master and mistress, and making arrangements for an increase of salary, the old housekeeper tottered off to her own room.

2

The storm raged fiercely all that night, but nothing of particular note occurred. The next morning, however, when they came down to breakfast, they found the terrible stain of blood once again on the floor. "I don't think it can be the fault of the Paragon Detergent," said Washington, "for I have tried it with everything. It must be the ghost." He accordingly rubbed out the stain a second time, but the second morning it appeared again. The third morning also it was there, though the library had been locked up at night by Mr. Otis himself, and the key carried upstairs. The whole family were now quite interested; Mr. Otis began to suspect that he had been too dogmatic in his denial of the existence of ghosts, Mrs. Otis expressed her intention of joining the Psychical Society, and Washington prepared a long letter to Messrs. Myers and Podmore on the subject of the Permanence of Sanguineous Stains when connected with crime. That night all doubts about the objective existence of phantasmata were removed forever.

The day had been warm and sunny; and, in the cool of the evening, the whole family went out for a drive. They did not return home till nine o'clock, when they had a light supper. The conversation in no way turned upon ghosts, so there were not even those primary conditions of receptive expectation which so often precede the presentation of psychical phenomena. The subjects discussed, as I have since learned from Mr. Otis, were merely such as form the ordinary conversation of cultured Americans of the better class, such as the immense superiority of Miss Fanny Davenport over

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Sarah Bernhardt as an actress; the difficulty of obtaining green corn, buckwheat cakes, and hominy, even in the best English houses; the importance of Boston in the development of the world soul; the advantages of the baggage check system in railway travelling; and the sweetness of the New York accent as compared to the London drawl. No mention at all was made of the supernatural, nor was Sir Simon de Canterville alluded to in any way. At eleven o'clock the family retired, and by half past all the lights were out. Some time after, Mr. Otis was awakened by a curious noise in the corridor, outside his room. It sounded like the clank of metal, and seemed to be coming nearer every moment. He got up at once, struck a match, and looked at the time. It was exactly one o'clock. He was quite calm, and felt his pulse, which was not at all feverish. The strange noise still continued, and with it he heard distinctly the sound of footsteps. He put on his slippers, took a small oblong vial out of his dressing case, and opened the door. Right in front of him he saw, in the wan moonlight, an old man of terrible aspect. His eyes were as red as burning coals; long grey hair fell over his shoulders in matted coils; his garments, which were of antique cut, were soiled and ragged, and from his wrists and ankles hung heavy manacles and rusty gyves.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Otis, "I really must insist on your oiling those chains, and have brought you for that purpose a small bottle of the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator. It is said to be completely efficacious upon one application, and there are several testimonials to that effect on the wrapper from some of our most eminent native divines. I shall leave it here for you by the bedroom candles, and will be happy to supply you with more should you require it." With these words the United States minister laid the bottle down on a marble table, and, closing his door, retired to rest.

For a moment the Canterville ghost stood quite motionless in natural indignation; then, dashing the bottle violently upon the polished floor, he fled down the corridor, uttering hollow groans, and emitting a ghastly green light. Just, however, as he reached the top of the great oak staircase, a door was flung open, two little white-robed figures appeared, and a large pillow whizzed past his head! There was evidently no time to be lost, so, hastily adopting the Fourth Dimension of Space as a means of escape, he vanished through the wainscoting, and the house became quite quiet.

On reaching a small secret chamber in the left wing, he leaned up against a moonbeam to recover his breath, and began to try and realize his position. Never, in a brilliant and uninterrupted career

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of three hundred years, had he been so grossly insulted. He thought of the dowager duchess, whom he had frightened into a fit as she stood before the glass in her lace and diamonds; of the four housemaids, who had gone off into hysterics when he merely grinned at them through the curtains of one of the spare bedrooms; of the rector of the parish, whose candle he had blown out as he was coming late one night from the library, and who had been under the care of Sir William Gull ever since, a perfect martyr to nervous disorders; and of old Madame de Tremouillac, who, having wakened up one morning early and seen a skeleton seated in an armchair by the fire reading her diary, had been confined to her bed for six weeks with an attack of brain fever, and, on her recovery, had become reconciled to the Church, and had broken off her connection with that notorious sceptic Monsieur de Voltaire. He remembered the terrible night when the wicked Lord Canterville was found choking in his dressing room, with the knave of diamonds halfway down his throat, and confessed, just before he died, that he had cheated Charles James Fox out of fifty thousand pounds at Crockford's by means of that very card, and swore that the ghost had made him swallow it. All his great achievements came back to him again, from the butler who had shot himself in the pantry because he had seen a green hand tapping at the window pane, to the beautiful Lady Stutfield, who was always obliged to wear a black velvet band round her throat to hide the mark of five fingers burnt upon her white skin, and who drowned herself at last in the carp pond at the end of the King's Walk. With the enthusiastic egotism of the true artist he went over his most celebrated performances, and smiled bitterly to himself as he recalled to mind his last appearance as "Red Ruben, or the Strangled Babe," his *début* as "Gaunt Gideon, the Bloodsucker of Bexley Moor," and the *furore* he had excited one lovely June evening by merely playing ninepins with his own bones upon the lawn-tennis ground. And after all this, some wretched modern Americans were to come and offer him the Rising Sun Lubricator, and throw pillows at his head! It was quite unbearable. Besides, no ghosts in history had ever been treated in this manner. Accordingly, he determined to have vengeance, and remained till daylight in an attitude of deep thought.

3

The next morning when the Otis family met at breakfast, they

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discussed the ghost at some length. The United States minister was naturally a little annoyed to find that his present had not been accepted. "I have no wish," he said, "to do the ghost any personal injury, and I must say that, considering the length of time he has been in the house, I don't think it is at all polite to throw pillows at him"—a very just remark, at which, I am sorry to say, the twins burst into shouts of laughter. "Upon the other hand," he continued, "if he really declines to use the Rising Sun Lubricator, we shall have to take his chains from him. It would be quite impossible to sleep, with such a noise going on outside the bedrooms."

For the rest of the week, however, they were undisturbed, the only thing that excited any attention being the continual renewal of the bloodstain on the library floor. This certainly was very strange, as the door was always locked at night by Mr. Otis, and the windows kept closely barred. The chameleon-like color, also, of the stain excited a good deal of comment. Some mornings it was a dull (almost Indian) red, then it would be vermilion, then a rich purple, and once when they came down for family prayers, according to the simple rites of the Free American Reformed Episcopalian Church, they found it a bright emerald green. These kaleidoscopic changes naturally amused the party very much, and bets on the subject were freely made every evening. The only person who did not enter into the joke was little Virginia, who, for some unexplained reason, was always a good deal distressed at the sight of the bloodstain, and very nearly cried the morning it was emerald green.

The second appearance of the ghost was on Sunday night. Shortly after they had gone to bed they were suddenly alarmed by a fearful crash in the hall. Rushing downstairs, they found that a large suit of old armor had become detached from its stand, and had fallen on the stone floor, while, seated in a high-backed chair, was the Canterville ghost, rubbing his knees with an expression of acute agony on his face. The twins, having brought their peashooters with them, at once discharged two pellets on him, with that accuracy of aim which can only be attained by long and careful practice on a writing master, while the United States minister covered him with his revolver, and called upon him, in accordance with Californian etiquette, to hold up his hands! The ghost started up with a wild shriek of rage, and swept through them like a mist, extinguishing Washington Otis's candle as he passed, and so leaving them all in total darkness. On reaching the top of the staircase he recovered himself, and determined to give his celebrated peal

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of demoniac laughter. This he had on more than one occasion found extremely useful. It was said to have turned Lord Raker's wig grey in a single night, and had certainly made three of Lady Canterville's French governesses give warning before their month was up. He accordingly laughed his most horrible laugh, till the old vaulted roof rang and rang again, but hardly had the fearful echo died away when a door opened, and Mrs. Otis came out in a light blue dressing gown. "I am afraid you are far from well," she said, "and have brought you a bottle of Dr. Dobell's tincture. If it is indigestion, you will find it a most excellent remedy." The ghost glared at her in fury, and began at once to make preparations for turning himself into a large black dog, an accomplishment for which he was justly renowned, and to which the family doctor always attributed the permanent idiocy of Lord Canterville's uncle, the Honorable Thomas Horton. The sound of approaching footsteps, however, made him hesitate in his fell purpose, so he contented himself with becoming faintly phosphorescent, and vanished with a deep churchyard groan, just as the twins had come up to him.

On reaching his room he entirely broke down, and became a prey to the most violent agitation. The vulgarity of the twins, and the gross materialism of Mrs. Otis, were naturally extremely annoying, but what really distressed him most was that he had been unable to wear the suit of mail. He had hoped that even modern Americans would be thrilled by the sight of a Spectre in Armor, if for no more sensible reason, at least out of respect for their national poet Longfellow, over whose graceful and attractive poetry he himself had whiled away many a weary hour when the Cantervilles were up in town. Besides, it was his own suit. He had worn it with success at the Kenilworth tournament, and had been highly complimented on it by no less a person than the Virgin Queen herself. Yet when he had put it on, he had been completely overpowered by the weight of the huge breastplate and steel casque, and had fallen heavily on the stone pavement, barking both his knees severely, and bruising the knuckles of his right hand.

For some days after this he was extremely ill, and hardly stirred out of his room at all, except to keep the bloodstain in proper repair. However, by taking great care of himself, he recovered, and resolved to make a third attempt to frighten the United States minister and his family. He selected Friday, the seventeenth of August, for his appearance, and spent most of that day in looking over his wardrobe, ultimately deciding in favor of a large slouched hat with a red feather, a winding sheet frilled at the wrists and neck, and

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a rusty dagger. Towards evening a violent storm of rain came on, and the wind was so high that all the windows and doors in the old house shook and rattled. In fact, it was just such weather as he loved. His plan of action was this. He was to make his way quietly to Washington Otis's room, gibber at him from the foot of the bed, and stab himself three times in the throat to the sound of slow music. He bore Washington a special grudge, being quite aware that it was he who was in the habit of removing the famous Canterville bloodstain, by means of Pinkerton's Paragon Detergent. Having reduced the reckless and foolhardy youth to a condition of abject terror, he was then to proceed to the room occupied by the United States minister and his wife, and there to place a clammy hand on Mrs. Otis's forehead, while he hissed into her trembling husband's ear the awful secrets of the charnel house. With regard to little Virginia, he had not quite made up his mind. She had never insulted him in any way, and was pretty and gentle. A few hollow groans from the wardrobe, he thought, would be more than sufficient, or, if that failed to wake her, he might grabble at the counterpane with palsy-twitching fingers. As for the twins, he was quite determined to teach them a lesson. The first thing to be done was, of course, to sit upon their chests, so as to produce the stifling sensation of nightmare. Then, as their beds were quite close to each other, to stand between them in the form of a green, icy-cold corpse, till they became paralyzed with fear, and finally, to throw off the winding sheet, and crawl around the room, with white bleached bones and one rolling eyeball, in the character of "Dumb Daniel, or the Suicide's Skeleton," a *rôle* in which he had on more than one occasion produced a great effect, and which he considered quite equal to his famous part of "Martin the Maniac, or the Masked Mystery."

At half past ten he heard the family going to bed. For some time he was disturbed by wild shrieks of laughter from the twins, who, with the lighthearted gaiety of schoolboys, were evidently amusing themselves before they retired to rest, but at a quarter past eleven all was still, and, as midnight sounded, he sallied forth. The owl beat against the window panes, the raven croaked from the old yew tree, and the wind wandered moaning around the house like a lost soul; but the Otis family slept unconscious of their doom, and high above the rain and storm he could hear the steady snoring of the minister for the United States. He stepped stealthily out of the wainscoting, with an evil smile on his cruel, wrinkled mouth, and the moon hid her face in a cloud as he stole past the great oriel

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window, where his own arms and those of his murdered wife were blazoned in azure and gold. On and on he glided, like an evil shadow, the very darkness seeming to loathe him as he passed. Once he thought he heard something call, and stopped; but it was only the baying of a dog from the Red Farm, and he went on, muttering strange sixteenth century curses, and ever and anon brandishing the rusty dagger in the midnight air. Finally he reached the corner of the passage that led to luckless Washington's room. For a moment he paused there, the wind blowing his long grey locks about his head, and twisting into grotesque and fantastic folds the nameless horror of the dead man's shroud. Then the clock struck the quarter, and he felt the time was come. He chuckled to himself, and turned the corner; but no sooner had he done so, than, with a piteous wail of terror, he fell back, and hid his blanched face in his long, bony hands. Right in front of him was standing a horrible spectre, motionless as a carven image, and monstrous as a madman's dream! Its head was bald and burnished; its face round, and fat, and white; and hideous laughter seemed to have writhed its features into an eternal grin. From the eyes streamed rays of scarlet light, the mouth was a wide well of fire, and a hideous garment, like to his own, swathed with its silent snows the Titan form. On its breast was a placard with strange writing in antique characters, some scroll of shame it seemed, some record of wild sins, some awful calendar of crime, and, with its right hand, it bore aloft a falchion of gleaming steel.

Never having seen a ghost before, he naturally was terribly frightened, and, after a second hasty glance at the awful phantom, he fled back to his room, tripping up in his long winding sheet as he sped down the corridor, and finally dropping the rusty dagger into the minister's jack-boots, where it was found in the morning by the butler. Once in the privacy of his own apartment, he flung himself down on a small pallet bed, and hid his face under the clothes. After a time, however, the brave old Canterville spirit asserted itself, and he determined to go and speak to the other ghost as soon as it was daylight. Accordingly, just as the dawn was touching the hills with silver, he returned towards the spot where he had first laid eyes on the grisly phantom, feeling that, after all, two ghosts were better than one, and that, by the aid of his new friend, he might safely grapple with the twins. On reaching the spot, however, a terrible sight met his gaze. Something had evidently happened to the spectre, for the light had entirely faded from its hollow eyes, the gleaming falchion had fallen from its

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hand, and it was leaning up against the wall in a strained and uncomfortable attitude. He rushed forward and seized it in his arms, when, to his horror, the head slipped off and rolled on the floor, the body assumed a recumbent posture, and he found himself clasping a white dimity bedcurtain, with a sweeping brush, a kitchen cleaver, and a hollow turnip lying at his feet! Unable to understand this curious transformation, he clutched the placard with feverish haste, and there, in the grey morning light, he read these fearful words:

YE OTIS GHOSTE.
Ye Onlie True and Originale Spook.
Beware of Ye Imitations.
All others are Counterfeite.

The whole thing flashed across him. He had been tricked, foiled, and outwitted! The old Canterville look came into his eyes; he ground his toothless gums together; and, raising his withered hands high above his head, swore, according to the picturesque phraseology of the antique school, that when Chanticleer had sounded twice his merry horn, deeds of blood would be wrought, and Murder walk abroad with silent feet.

Hardly had he finished this awful oath when, from the red tiled roof of a distant homestead, a cock crew. He laughed a long, low, bitter laugh, and waited. Hour after hour he waited, but the cock, for some strange reason, did not crow again. Finally, at half past seven, the arrival of the housemaids made him give up his fearful vigil, and he stalked back to his room, thinking of his vain hope and baffled purpose. There he consulted several books of ancient chivalry, of which he was exceedingly fond, and found that, on every occasion on which his oath had been used, Chanticleer had always crowed a second time. "Perdition seize the naughty fowl," he muttered, "I have seen the day when, with my stout spear, I would have run him through the gorge, and made him crow for me an 'twere in death!" He then retired to a comfortable lead coffin, and stayed there till evening.

4

The next day the ghost was very weak and tired. The terrible excitement of the last four weeks was beginning to have its effect. His nerves were completely shattered, and he started at the slightest noise. For five days he kept his room, and at last made up his

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mind to give up the point of the bloodstain on the library floor. If the Otis family did not want it, they clearly did not deserve it. They were evidently people on a low, material plane of existence, and quite incapable of appreciating the symbolic value of sensuous phenomena. The question of phantasmic apparitions, and the development of astral bodies, was of course quite a different matter, and really not under his control. It was his solemn duty to appear in the corridor once a week, and to gibber from the large oriel window on the first and third Wednesday in every month, and he did not see how he could honorably escape from his obligations. It is quite true that his life had been very evil, but, upon the other hand, he was most conscientious in all things connected with the supernatural. For the next three Saturdays, accordingly, he traversed the corridor as usual between midnight and three o'clock, taking every possible precaution against being either heard or seen. He removed his boots, trod as lightly as possible on the old worm-eaten boards, wore a large black velvet cloak, and was careful to use the Rising Sun Lubricator for oiling his chains. I am bound to acknowledge that it was with a good deal of difficulty that he brought himself to adopt this last mode of protection. However, one night, while the family were at dinner, he slipped into Mr. Otis's bedroom and carried off the bottle. He felt a little humiliated at first, but afterwards was sensible enough to see that there was a great deal to be said for the invention, and, to a certain degree, it served his purpose. Still, in spite of everything, he was not left unmolested. Strings were continually being stretched across the corridor, over which he tripped in the dark, and on one occasion, while dressed for the part of "Black Isaac, or the Huntsman of Hogley Woods," he met with a severe fall, through treading on a butter-slide, which the twins had constructed from the entrance of the Tapestry Chamber to the top of the oak staircase. This last insult so enraged him that he resolved to assert his dignity, and determined to visit the insolent young Etonians the next night in his celebrated character of "Reckless Rupert, or the Headless Earl."

He had not appeared in this disguise for more than seventy years; in fact, not since he had so frightened pretty Lady Barbara Modish by means of it that she suddenly broke off her engagement with the present Lord Canterville's grandfather, and ran away to Gretna Green with handsome Jack Castleton, declaring that nothing in the world would induce her to marry into a family that allowed such a horrible phantom to walk up and down the terrace at twi-

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light. Poor Jack was afterwards shot in a duel by Lord Canterville on Wandsworth Common, and Lady Barbara died of a broken heart at Tunbridge Wells before the year was out, so, in every way, it had been a great success. It was, however, an extremely difficult "make-up," if I may use such a theatrical expression in connection with one of the greatest mysteries of the supernatural, or, to employ a more scientific term, the high-natural world, and it took him fully three hours to make his preparations. At last everything was ready, and he was very pleased with his appearance. The big leather riding boots that went with the dress were just a little too large for him, and he could only find one of the two horse-pistols, but, on the whole, he was quite satisfied, and at a quarter past one he glided out of the wainscoting and crept down the corridor. On reaching the room occupied by the twins, which I should mention was called the Blue Bed Chamber, on account of the color of its hangings, he found the door ajar. Wishing to make an effective entrance, he flung it wide open, when a heavy jug of water fell right down on him, wetting him to the skin, and just missing his left shoulder by a couple of inches. At the same moment he heard stifled shrieks of laughter proceeding from the four-post bed. The shock to his nervous system was so great that he fled back to his room as hard as he could go, and the next day he was laid up with a severe cold. The only thing that at all consoled him in the whole affair was the fact that he had not brought his head with him, for, had he done so, the consequences might have been very serious.

He now gave up all hope of ever frightening this rude American family, and contented himself, as a rule, with creeping about the passages in list slippers, with a thick red muffler round his throat for fear of drafts, and a small arquebus, in case he should be attacked by the twins. The final blow he received occurred on the nineteenth of September. He had gone downstairs to the great entrance hall, feeling sure that there, at any rate, he would be quite unmolested, and was amusing himself by making satirical remarks on the large Saroni photographs of the United States minister and his wife, which had now taken the place of the Canterville family pictures. He was simply but neatly clad in a long shroud, spotted with churchyard mold, had tied up his jaw with a strip of yellow linen, and carried a small lantern and a sexton's spade. In fact, he was dressed for the character of "Jonas the Graveless, or the Corpse-Snatcher of Chertsey Barn," one of his most remarkable impersonations, and one which the Cantervilles had every reason to remember, as it was the real origin of their quarrel

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with their neighbor, Lord Rufford. It was about a quarter past two o'clock in the morning, and, as far as he could ascertain, no one was stirring. As he was strolling towards the library, however, to see if there were any traces left of the bloodstain, suddenly there leaped out on him from a dark corner two figures, who waved their arms wildly above their heads, and shrieked out "BOO!" in his ear.

Seized with a panic, which, under the circumstances, was only natural, he rushed for the staircase, but found Washington Otis waiting for him there with the big garden syringe; and being thus hemmed in by his enemies on every side, and driven almost to bay, he vanished into the great iron stove, which, fortunately for him, was not lit, and had to make his way home through the flues and chimneys, arriving at his own room in a terrible state of dirt, disorder, and despair.

After this he was not seen again on any nocturnal expedition. The twins lay in wait for him on several occasions, and strewed the passages with nutshells every night to the great annoyance of their parents and the servants, but it was of no avail. It was quite evident that his feelings were so wounded that he would not appear. Mr. Otis, consequently, resumed his great work on the history of the Democratic Party, on which he had been engaged for some years; Mrs. Otis organized a wonderful clambake, which amazed the whole county; the boys took to lacrosse, euchre, poker, and other American national games; and Virginia rode about the lanes on her pony, accompanied by the young Duke of Cheshire, who had come to spend the last week of his holidays at Canterville Chase. It was generally assumed that the ghost had gone away, and, in fact, Mr. Otis wrote a letter to that effect to Lord Canterville, who, in reply, expressed his great pleasure at the news, and sent his best congratulations to the minister's worthy wife.

The Otises, however, were deceived, for the ghost was still in the house, and though now almost an invalid, was by no means ready to let matters rest, particularly as he heard that among the guests was the young Duke of Cheshire, whose grand-uncle, Lord Francis Stilton, had once bet a hundred guineas with Colonel Carbury that he would play dice with the Canterville ghost, and was found that next morning lying on the floor of the card room in such a helpless paralytic state that though he lived on to a great age, he was never able to say anything again but "Double Sixes." The story was well known at the time, though, of course, out of respect to the feelings of the two noble families, every attempt was made to hush it up; and a full account of all the circumstances connected with it will

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be found in the third volume of Lord Tattle's *Recollections of the Prince Regent and His Friends*. The ghost, then, was naturally very anxious to show that he had not lost his influence over the Stiltons, with whom, indeed, he was distantly connected, his own first cousin having been married *en secondes noces* to the Sieur de Bulkeley, from whom, as everyone knows, the dukes of Cheshire are lineally descended. Accordingly, he made arrangements for appearing to Virginia's little lover in his celebrated impersonation of "The Vampire Monk, or, the Bloodless Benedictine," a performance so horrible that when old Lady Startup saw it, which she did on one fatal New Year's Eve, in the year 1764, she went off into the most piercing shrieks, which culminated in violent apoplexy, and died in three days, after disinheriting the Cantervilles, who were her nearest relations, and leaving all her money to her London apothecary. At the last moment, however, his terror of the twins prevented his leaving his room, and the little duke slept in peace under the great feathered canopy in the Royal Bedchamber, and dreamed of Virginia.

5

A few days after this, Virginia and her curly-haired cavalier went out riding on Brockley meadows, where she tore her habit so badly in getting through a hedge, that, on her return home, she made up her mind to go up by the back staircase so as not to be seen. As she was running past the Tapestry Chamber, the door of which happened to be open, she fancied she saw someone inside, and thinking it was her mother's maid, who sometimes used to bring her work there, looked in to ask her to mend her habit. To her immense surprise, however, it was the Canterville ghost himself! He was sitting by the window, watching the ruined gold of the yellow trees fly through the air, and the red leaves dancing madly down the long avenue. His head was leaning on his hand, and his whole attitude was one of extreme depression. Indeed, so forlorn, and so much out of repair did he look, that little Virginia, whose first idea had been to run away and lock herself in her room, was filled with pity, and determined to try and comfort him. So light was her footfall, and so deep his melancholy, that he was not aware of her presence till she spoke to him.

"I am sorry for you," she said, "but my brothers are going back to Eton tomorrow, and then, if you behave yourself, no one will annoy you."

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"It is absurd asking me to behave myself," he answered, looking round in astonishment at the pretty little girl who had ventured to address him, "quite absurd. I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night, if that is what you mean. It is my only reason for existing."

"It is no reason at all for existing, and you know you have been very wicked. Mrs. Umney told us, the first day we arrived here, that you had killed your wife."

"Well, I quite admit it," said the ghost petulantly, "but it was a purely family matter, and concerned no one else."

"It is very wrong to kill anyone," said Virginia, who at times had a sweet Puritan gravity, caught from some old New England ancestor.

"Oh, I hate the cheap severity of abstract ethics! My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery. Why, there was a buck I had shot in Hogley Woods, a magnificent pricket, and do you know how she had it sent up to table? However, it is no matter now, for it is all over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, though I did kill her."

"Starve you to death? Oh, Mr. Ghost, I mean Sir Simon, are you hungry? I have a sandwich in my case. Would you like it?"

"No, thank you, I never eat anything now; but it is very kind of you, all the same, and you are much nicer than the rest of your horrid, rude, vulgar, dishonest family."

"Stop!" cried Virginia, stamping her foot, "it is you who are rude, and horrid, and vulgar; and as for dishonesty, you know you stole the paints out of my box to try and furbish up that ridiculous bloodstain in the library. First you took all my reds, including the vermilion, and I couldn't do any more sunsets, then you took the emerald green and the chrome yellow, and finally I had nothing left but indigo and Chinese white, and could only do moonlight scenes, which are always depressing to look at, and not at all easy to paint. I never told on you, though I was very much annoyed, and it was most ridiculous, the whole thing; for whoever heard of emerald green blood?"

"Well, really," said the ghost, rather meekly, "what was I to do? It is a very difficult thing to get real blood nowadays, and, as your brother began it all with his Paragon Detergent, I certainly saw no reason why I should not have your paints. As for color, that is always a matter of taste: the Cantervilles have blue blood, for instance, the very bluest in England; but I know you Americans

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don't care for things of this kind."

"You know nothing about it, and the best thing you can do is to emigrate and improve your mind. My father will be only too happy to give you a free passage, and though there is a heavy duty on spirits of every kind, there will be no difficulty about the Custom House, as the officers are all Democrats. Once in New York, you are sure to be a great success. I know lots of people there who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather, and much more than that to have a family ghost."

"I don't think I should like America."

"I suppose because we have no ruins and no curiosities," said Virginia satirically.

"No ruins! no curiosities!" answered the ghost; "you have your navy and your manners."

"Good evening; I will go and ask papa to get the twins an extra week's holiday."

"Please don't go, Miss Virginia," he cried; "I am so lonely and so unhappy, and I really don't know what to do. I want to go to sleep and I cannot."

"That's quite absurd. You have merely to go to bed and blow out the candle. It is very difficult sometimes to keep awake, especially at church, but there is no difficulty at all about sleeping. Why, even babies know how to do that, and they are not very clever."

"I have not slept for three hundred years," he said sadly, and Virginia's beautiful blue eyes opened in wonder; "for three hundred years I have not slept, and I am so tired."

Virginia grew quite grave, and her little lips trembled like rose-leaves. She came towards him and, kneeling down at his side, looked up into his old withered face.

"Poor, poor ghost," she murmured; "have you no place where you can sleep?"

"Far away beyond the pine woods," he answered, in a low dreamy voice, "there is a little garden. There the grass grows long and deep, there are the great white stars of the hemlock flower, there the nightingale sings all night long. All night long he sings, and the cold, crystal moon looks down, and the yew tree spreads out its giant arms over the sleepers."

Virginia's eyes grew dim with tears, and she hid her face in her hands.

"You mean the Garden of Death," she whispered.

"Yes, Death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to

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silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forgive life, to be at peace. You can help me. You can open for me the portals of Death's house, for Love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is."

Virginia trembled, a cold shudder ran through her, and for a few moments there was silence. She felt as if she was in a terrible dream.

Then the ghost spoke again, and his voice sounded like the sighing of the wind.

"Have you ever read the old prophecy on the library window?"

"Oh, often," cried the little girl, looking up; "I know it quite well. It is painted in curious black letters, and it is difficult to read. There are only six lines:

When a golden girl can win
Prayer from out the lips of sin,
When the barren almond bears,
And a little child gives away its tears,
Then shall all the house be still
And peace come to Canterville.

But I don't know what they mean."

"They mean," he said sadly, "that you must weep for me for my sins, because I have no tears, and pray for me for my soul, because I have no faith, and then, if you have always been sweet, and good, and gentle, the Angel of Death will have mercy on me. You will see fearful shapes in darkness, and wicked voices will whisper in your ear, but they will not harm you, for against the purity of a little child the powers of Hell cannot prevail."

Virginia made no answer, and the ghost wrung his hands in wild despair as he looked down at her bowed golden head. Suddenly she stood up, very pale, and with a strange light in her eyes. "I am not afraid," she said firmly, "and I will ask the Angel to have mercy on you."

He rose from his seat with a faint cry of joy, and taking her hand bent over it with old-fashioned grace and kissed it. His fingers were as cold as ice, and his lips burned like fire, but Virginia did not falter as he led her across the dusky room. On the faded green tapestry were broidered little huntsmen. They blew their tasselled horns and with their tiny hands waved to her to go back. "Go back! little Virginia," they cried, "go back!" but the ghost clutched her hand more tightly, and she shut her eyes against them. Horrible

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animals with lizard tails, and goggle eyes, blinked at her from the carven chimneypiece, and murmured "Beware! little Virginia, beware! we may never see you again," but the ghost glided on more swiftly, and Virginia did not listen. When they reached the end of the room he stopped, and muttered some words she could not understand. She opened her eyes, and saw the wall slowly fading away like a mist, and a great black cavern in front of her. A bitter cold wind swept round them, and she felt something pulling at her dress. "Quick, quick," cried the ghost, "or it will be too late," and, in a moment, the wainscoting had closed behind them, and the Tapestry Chamber was empty.

6

About ten minutes later, the bell rang for tea, and, as Virginia did not come down, Mrs. Otis sent up one of the footmen to tell her. After a little time he returned and said that he could not find Miss Virginia anywhere. As she was in the habit of going out to the garden every evening to get flowers for the dinner table, Mrs. Otis was not at all alarmed at first, but when six o'clock struck, and Virginia did not appear, she became really agitated, and sent the boys out to look for her, while she herself and Mr. Otis searched every room in the house. At half past six the boys came back and said that they could find no trace of their sister anywhere. They were all now in the greatest state of excitement, and did not know what to do, when Mr. Otis suddenly remembered that, some few days before, he had given a band of gypsies permission to camp in the park. He accordingly at once set off for Blackfell Hollow, where he knew they were, accompanied by his eldest son and two of the farm servants. The little Duke of Cheshire, who was perfectly frantic with anxiety, begged hard to be allowed to go too, but Mr. Otis would not allow him, as he was afraid there might be a scuffle. On arriving at the spot, however, he found that the gypsies had gone, and it was evident that their departure had been rather sudden, as the fire was still burning, and some plates were lying on the grass. Having sent off Washington and the two men to scour the district, he ran home, and despatched telegrams to all the police inspectors in the county, telling them to look out for a little girl who had been kidnapped by tramps or gypsies. He then ordered his horse to be brought round, and, after insisting on his wife and the three boys sitting down to dinner, rode off down the Ascot Road with a groom. He had hardly, however, gone a couple of miles when

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he heard somebody galloping after him, and, looking round, saw the little duke coming up on his pony, with his face very flushed and no hat. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Otis," gasped out the boy, "but I can't eat any dinner as long as Virginia is lost. Please, don't be angry with me; if you had let us be engaged last year, there would never have been all this trouble. You won't send me back, will you? I can't go! I won't go!"

The minister could not help smiling at the handsome young scapegrace, and was a good deal touched at his devotion to Virginia, so leaning down from his horse, he patted him kindly on the shoulders, and said, "Well, Cecil, if you won't go back I suppose you must come with me, but I must get you a hat at Ascot."

"Oh, bother my hat! I want Virginia!" cried the little duke, laughing, and they galloped on to the railway station. There Mr. Otis inquired of the station master if anyone answering the description of Virginia had been seen on the platform, but could get no news of her. The station master, however, wired up and down the line, and assured him that a strict watch would be kept for her, and, after having bought a hat for the little duke from a linen draper, who was just putting up his shutters, Mr. Otis rode off to Bexley, a village about four miles away, which he was told was a well-known haunt of the gypsies, as there was a large common next to it. Here they roused up the rural policeman, but could get no information from him, and, after riding all over the common, they turned their horses' heads homewards, and reached the Chase about eleven o'clock, dead tired and almost heartbroken. They found Washington and the twins waiting for them at the gatehouse with lanterns, as the avenue was very dark. Not the slightest trace of Virginia had been discovered. The gypsies had been caught on Broxley meadows, but she was not with them, and they had explained their sudden departure by saying that they had mistaken the date of Chorton Fair, and had gone off in a hurry for fear they might be late. Indeed, they had been quite distressed at hearing of Virginia's disappearance, as they were very grateful to Mr. Otis for having allowed them to camp in his park, and four of their number had stayed behind to help in the search. The carp pond had been dragged, and the whole Chase thoroughly gone over, but without any result. It was evident that, for that night at any rate, Virginia was lost to them; and it was in a state of the deepest depression that Mr. Otis and the boys walked up to the house, the groom following behind with the two horses and the pony. In the hall they found a group of frightened servants, and lying on a sofa

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in the library was poor Mrs. Otis, almost out of her mind with terror and anxiety, and having her forehead bathed with eau-de-cologne by the old housekeeper. Mr. Otis at once insisted on her having something to eat, and ordered up supper for the whole party. It was a melancholy meal, as hardly anyone spoke, and even the twins were awestruck and subdued, as they were very fond of their sister. When they had finished, Mr. Otis, in spite of the entreaties of the little duke, ordered them all to bed, saying that nothing more could be done that night, and that he would telegraph in the morning to Scotland Yard for some detectives to be sent down immediately. Just as they were passing out of the dining room, midnight began to boom from the clock tower, and when the last stroke sounded they heard a crash and a sudden shrill cry; a dreadful peal of thunder shook the house, a strain of unearthly music floated through the air, a panel at the top of the staircase flew back with a loud noise, and out on the landing, looking very pale and white, with a little casket in her hand, stepped Virginia. In a moment they had all rushed up to her. Mrs. Otis clasped her passionately in her arms, the duke smothered her with violent kisses, and the twins executed a wild war dance round the group.

"Good heavens! child, where have you been?" said Mr. Otis, rather angrily, thinking that she had been playing some foolish trick on them. "Cecil and I have been riding all over the country looking for you, and your mother has been frightened to death. You must never play these practical jokes any more."

"Except on the ghost! except on the ghost!" shrieked the twins, as they capered about.

"My own darling, thank God you are found; you must never leave my side again," murmured Mrs. Otis, as she kissed the trembling child, and smoothed the tangled gold of her hair.

"Papa," said Virginia quietly, "I have been with the ghost. He is dead, and you must come and see him. He had been very wicked, but he was really sorry for all that he had done, and he gave me this box of beautiful jewels before he died."

The whole family gazed at her in mute amazement, but she was quite grave and serious; and, turning round, she led them through the opening in the wainscoting down a narrow secret corridor, Washington following with a lighted candle, which he had caught up from the table. Finally, they came to a great oak door, studded with rusty nails. When Virginia touched it, it swung back on its heavy hinges, and they found themselves in a little low room, with a vaulted ceiling, and one tiny grated window. Embedded in the

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wall was a huge iron ring, and chained to it was a gaunt skeleton, that was stretched out at full length on the stone floor, and seemed to be trying to grasp with its long fleshless fingers an old-fashioned trencher and ewer, that were placed just out of its reach. The jug had evidently been once filled with water, as it was covered inside with green mold. There was nothing on the trencher but a pile of dust. Virginia knelt down beside the skeleton, and, folding her little hands together, began to pray silently, while the rest of the party looked on in wonder at the terrible tragedy whose secret was now disclosed to them.

"Hallo?" suddenly exclaimed one of the twins, who had been looking out of the window to try and discover in what wing of the house the room was situated. "Hallo! the old withered almond tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers quite plainly in the moonlight."

"God has forgiven him," said Virginia gravely, as she rose to her feet, and a beautiful light seemed to illumine her face.

"What an angel you are!" cried the young duke, and he put his arm around her neck and kissed her.

7

Four days after these curious incidents a funeral started from Canterville Chase at about eleven o'clock at night. The hearse was drawn by eight black horses, each of which carried on its head a great tuft of nodding ostrich plumes, and the leaden coffin was covered by a rich purple pall, on which was embroidered in gold the Canterville coat of arms. By the side of the hearse and the coaches walked the servants with lighted torches, and the whole procession was wonderfully impressive. Lord Canterville was the chief mourner, having come up specially from Wales to attend the funeral, and sat in the first carriage along with little Virginia. Then came the United States minister and his wife, then Washington and the three boys, and in the last carriage was Mrs. Umney. It was generally felt that, as she had been frightened by the ghost for more than fifty years of her life, she had a right to see the last of him. A deep grave had been dug in the corner of the churchyard, just under the old yew tree, and the service was read in the most impressive manner by the Reverend Augustus Dampier. When the ceremony was over, the servants, according to an old custom observed in the Canterville family, extinguished their torches, and, as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, Virginia stepped forward and laid on it a large cross made of white and pink blos-

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soms. As she did so, the moon came out from behind a cloud, and flooded with its silent silver the little churchyard, and from a distant copse a nightingale began to sing. She thought of the ghost's description of the Garden of Death, her eyes became dim with tears, and she hardly spoke a word during the drive home.

The next morning, before Lord Canterville went up to town, Mr. Otis had an interview with him on the subject of the jewels the ghost had given to Virginia. They were perfectly magnificent, especially a certain ruby necklace with old Venetian setting, which was really a superb specimen of sixteenth century work, and their value was so great that Mr. Otis felt considerable scruples about allowing his daughter to accept them.

"My lord," he said, "I know that in this country mortmain is held to apply to trinkets as well as to land, and it is quite clear to me that these jewels are, or should be, heirlooms in your family. I must beg you, accordingly, to take them to London with you, and to regard them simply as a portion of your property which has been restored to you under certain strange conditions. As for my daughter, she is merely a child, and has as yet, I am glad to say, but little interest in such appurtenances of idle luxury. I am also informed by Mrs. Otis, who, I may say, is no mean authority upon art—having had the privilege of spending several winters in Boston when she was a girl—that these gems are of great monetary worth, and if offered for sale would fetch a tall price. Under these circumstances, Lord Canterville, I feel sure that you will recognize how impossible it would be for me to allow them to remain in the possession of any member of my family; and, indeed, all such vain gauds and toys, however suitable or necessary to the dignity of the British aristocracy, would be completely out of place among those who have been brought up on the severe, and I believe immortal, principles of republican simplicity. Perhaps I should mention that Virginia is very anxious that you should allow her to retain the box as a memento of your unfortunate but misguided ancestor. As it is extremely old, and consequently a good deal out of repair, you may perhaps think fit to comply with her request. For my own part, I confess I am a good deal surprised to find a child of mine expressing sympathy with medievalism in any form, and can only account for it by the fact that Virginia was born in one of your London suburbs shortly after Mrs. Otis had returned from a trip to Athens."

Lord Canterville listened very gravely to the worthy minister's speech, pulling his grey mustache now and then to hide an invol-

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untary smile, and when Mr. Otis had ended, he shook him cordially by the hand, and said, "My dear sir, your charming little daughter rendered my unlucky ancestor, Sir Simon, a very important service, and I and my family are much indebted to her for her marvelous courage and pluck. The jewels are clearly hers, and, egad, I believe that if I were heartless enough to take them from her, the wicked old fellow would be out of his grave in a fortnight, leading me the devil of a life. As for their being heirlooms, nothing is an heirloom that is not so mentioned in a will or legal document, and the existence of these jewels has been quite unknown. I assure you I have no more claim on them than your butler, and when Miss Virginia grows up I daresay she will be pleased to have pretty things to wear. Besides, you forget, Mr. Otis, that you took the furniture and the ghost at a valuation, and anything that belonged to the ghost passed at once into your possession, as, whatever activity Sir Simon may have shown in the corridor at night, in point of law he was really dead, and you acquired his property by purchase."

Mr. Otis was a good deal distressed at Lord Canterville's refusal, and begged him to reconsider his decision, but the good-natured peer was quite firm, and finally induced the minister to allow his daughter to retain the present the ghost had given her, and when, in the spring of 1890, the young Duchess of Cheshire was presented at the Queen's first drawing room on the occasion of her marriage, her jewels were the universal theme of admiration. For Virginia received the coronet, which is the reward of all good little American girls, and was married to her boy-lover as soon as he came of age. They were both so charming, and they loved each other so much, that everyone was delighted at the match, except the old Marchioness of Dumbleton, who had tried to catch the duke for one of her seven unmarried daughters, and had given no less than three expensive dinner parties for that purpose, and, strange to say, Mr. Otis himself. Mr. Otis was extremely fond of the young duke personally, but, theoretically, he objected to titles, and, to use his own words, "was not without apprehension lest, amid the enervating influences of a pleasure-loving aristocracy, the true principles of republican simplicity should be forgotten." His objections, however, were completely overruled, and I believe that when he walked up the aisle of St. George's, Hanover Square, with his daughter leaning on his arm, there was not a prouder man in the whole length and breadth of England.

The duke and duchess, after the honeymoon was over, went down to Canterville Chase, and on the day after their arrival they walked

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over in the afternoon to the lonely churchyard by the pinewoods. There had been a great deal of difficulty at first about the inscription on Sir Simon's tombstone, but finally it had been decided to engrave on it simply the initials of the old gentleman's name, and the verse from the library window. The duchess had brought with her some lovely roses, which she strewed upon the grave, and after they had stood by it for some time they strolled into the ruined chancel of the old abbey. There the duchess sat down on a fallen pillar, while her husband lay at her feet smoking a cigarette and looking up at her beautiful eyes. Suddenly he threw his cigarette away, took hold of her hand, and said to her, "Virginia, a wife should have no secrets from her husband."

"Dear Cecil! I have no secrets from you."

"Yes, you have," he answered, smiling, "you have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost."

"I have never told anyone, Cecil," said Virginia gravely.

"I know that, but you might tell me."

"Please don't ask me, Cecil. I cannot tell you. Poor Sir Simon! I owe him a great deal. Yes, don't laugh, Cecil, I really do. He made me see what Life is, and what Death signifies, and why Love is stronger than both."

The duke rose and kissed his wife lovingly.

"You can have your secret as long as I have your heart," he murmured.

"You have always had that, Cecil."

"And you will tell our children some day, won't you?"

Virginia blushed.

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THE STORY THAT WON



"Third Avenue El, Interior" by Berenice Abbott, Federal Arts Project, "Changing New York"; Museum of the City of New York.

The November Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by J. F. Peirce of Bryan, Texas. Honorable mentions go to David Landau of New York, New York; Beulah Hagermann of Honolulu, Hawaii; Norma Andrews Evans of Riverdale, Georgia; L. J. M. Forbes of Cleveland, Ohio; Janet A. Carey of Piscataway, New Jersey; and Stephen D. Jorden of St. Louis, Missouri.

THE ENTRANCE TO EL — J. F. Peirce

Few people know that Sherlock Holmes once travelled to the United States in response to a coded message in the agony columns—that Professor Moriarty would be on the platform of the Third Avenue el in New York City on January 3rd at ten o'clock to "take delivery of a package."

"The message was a trick, Watson," Holmes said on his return to 221-B Baker Street. "Moriarty knew I'd see the message and be there. He wasn't, but his henchmen were—to push me in front of the train, 'accidentally,' or shoot me."

"What saved you?" I asked.

"As I approached the entrance to the el, I saw two men and a woman waiting for the train. The woman stood by the door to the platform, her hands in her overcoat pockets. One man warmed his left hand at a potbellied stove but kept his right hand hidden. The other held a newspaper in his bare left hand. His right hand was in his overcoat pocket.

"The positions of their hands would have alerted me, but their eyes gave them away. One would have expected their attention to be on incoming trains, so they could rush out at the last moment, avoiding the cold, but, instead, their eyes were fixed on the approaching passengers.

"Fortunately, I wasn't wearing my deerstalker or smoking my meerschaum. I was disguised as an itinerant violinist."

"What luck!" I said.

"Not luck! Deduction!" he snapped, then grinned.

"It was el- ementary, my dear Watson."

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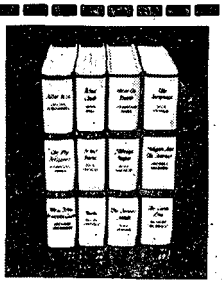
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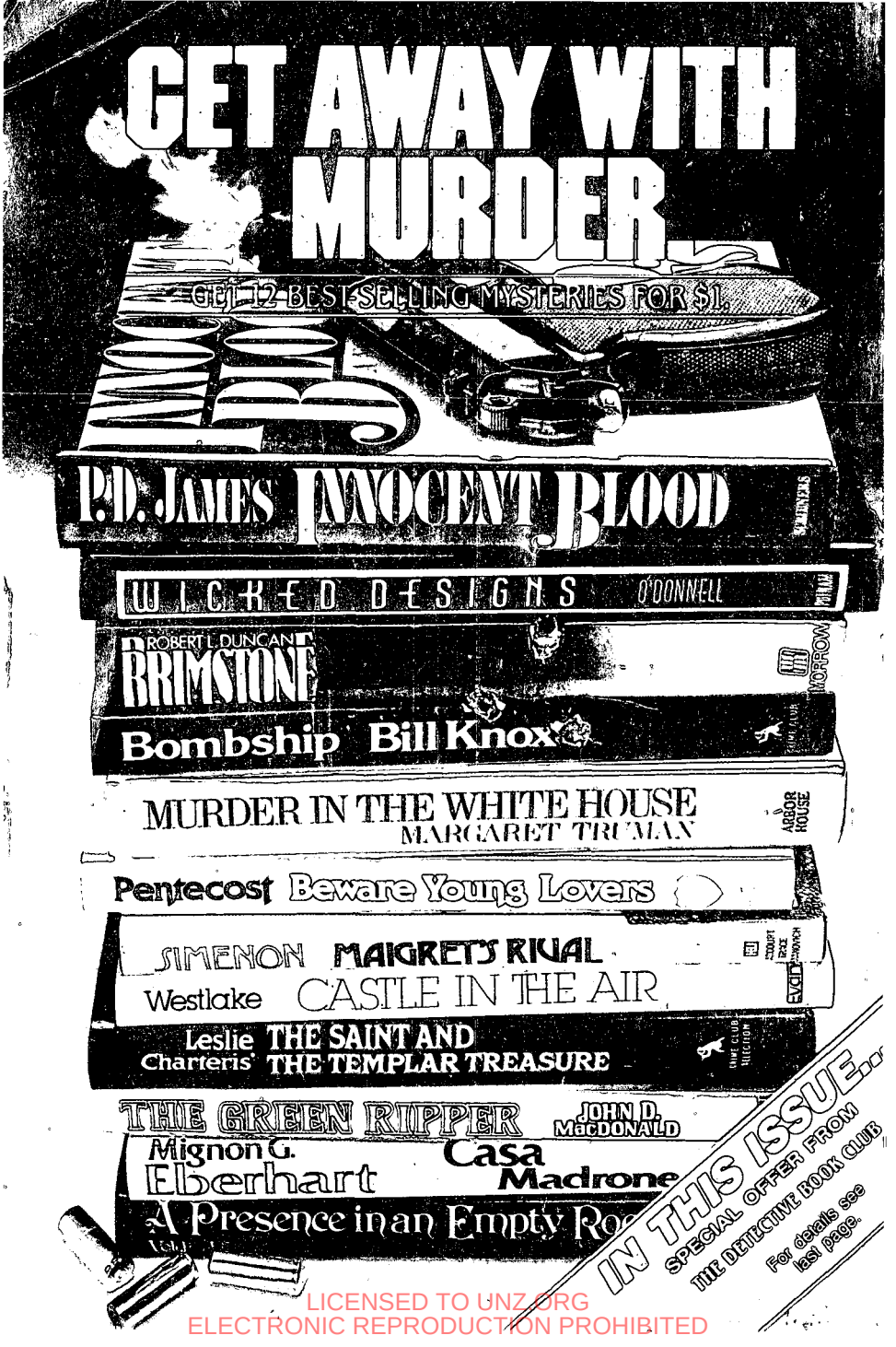
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